

# COLUMBIA JOURNAL REVIEW

January / February 2015 • cjr.org

## PLUS

James Foley's murder was a wake-up call for newsrooms that send freelancers into harm's way

Is *The New Republic* a public trust, or just a business?

## Playing the Press

Governments around the world are using stealthy new tactics to control the media

PHILIP BENNETT & MOISES NAIM



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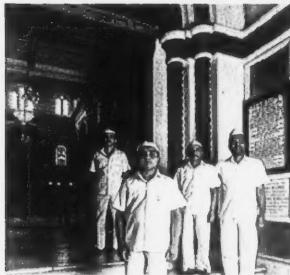
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# COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

January/February 2015

"To assess the performance of journalism ... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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# Opening Shot



Two-thousand fourteen was a very good year for the podcast. It saw the creation of five podcast networks; an estimated 15 percent of Americans listened to podcasts each month (up from 9 percent in 2008); and *Serial*, the most popular podcast ever, debuted in October and drew over a million listeners per episode; that same month, Ira Glass went on *The Tonight Show* to explain podcasting to the nation. This resurgence of a genre that had never quite lived up to the initial hype has been described as a “renaissance” and a “golden age.” More important, the economics of podcasting have begun to make sense. Low production costs, super-high audience engagement, and the seamless fit with an increasingly mobile, on-demand media world mean that advertisers love podcasts—and are willing to pay higher rates for access to what they offer. *New York* reported that for the top podcasts, advertisers pay between \$25 and \$45 CPM (the cost of reaching a thousand listeners), compared with \$1-\$18 for typical radio and \$5-\$20 for network TV. Is this the future of radio? Stay tuned. **CJR**

LUIS MELGREN

**Whodunnit?** Serial host Sarah Koenig and producer Dana Chivvis in the studio. The first season, which revisited the 16-year-old murder of a Maryland teenager, was a global hit, from the US to India.

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**EDITORIAL**

## Strangling dissent

Remember the Twitter Revolution? The good guys lost.

It is by now a storyline stitched into history, thanks to the popular press. In January 2011, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to Twitter and Facebook in a swell of rage that would ultimately topple an authoritarian government. Social media, this narrative went, would soon go on to reorder the Middle East. ¶ But if you stuck with the story, as journalists Philip Bennett and Moises Naim have, you would know that it is the autocrats who are outmaneuvering their opponents now, and they're using the internet to do so. The charges against fallen president Hosni Mubarak have been dropped, and the new repressive regime that now rules Egypt is thought to be devising a clandestine system to trace the conversations of Egyptian citizens on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks. So much for the benign hand of the internet.

This digital tug-of-war between the oppressors and the oppressed is playing out well beyond the Arab world, as Bennett and Naim make clear in their authoritative piece on the new face of censorship. The world's dictators may have been slow to adapt to new technology, but they've now leapfrogged those who would like to undo them. China is believed to have one of the most expansive surveillance systems in the world to monitor anything that smells of dissidence. But 21st-century censorship, as our authors describe it, comes in many flavors. In Venezuela, internet usage is rising while press freedom is on

work for a robust mainly by advertisers and syndication arrangements. In many ways, GlobalPost has been a standout success, winning a prestigious George Polk Award and an Overseas Press Club Award, among others. It has also made a diligent attempt to support its staff in the field, but like other freelance-powered organizations, it has struggled to provide a living wage for its correspondents, and in some instances proper support.

Freelancers now represent about one third of the journalists imprisoned around the world, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Organizations trying to carry the mantle of international reporting deserve credit for their passion. But the job comes with responsibilities. Among them are providing freelancers in conflict zones with flak jackets, safety training, a place to sleep, and most of all, an editor on the other end of the phone line ready to lend advice.

—Elizabeth Spayd

the wane. There, a popular strategy is to use shell companies as a kind of middleman between a tyrannical government and seemingly independent media outlets. The methods may vary but the outcome is the same: bare-knuckled censorship in a modern age. Hungary chokes the media into submission through taxes and fines. Pakistan favors bribes. Russia tosses rebellious editors out by the collar.

This despotic reign over the media draws far less publicity than does a street crowd of dissidents emboldened by their Twitter connection to the world. And that's regrettable, since the lesser-known story is the one worth watching now.

These efforts at media suppression come at an especially grim moment for international reporting. The steady decline of foreign bureaus around the world has contributed to a volatile and dangerous climate in the field of international reporting. Seasoned and well-funded journalists are being supplanted by less-experienced and faintly resourced freelancers. In conflict zones, the situation is worse. Not only is there less money for extras like flak jackets and sat phones, extremists in these regions increasingly see foreign journalists as targets for ransom and retaliation.

But the crumbling economics of newsrooms created an opening for places like GlobalPost, as Alexis Sobel Fitts reports in a compelling piece in this issue. GlobalPost was born in part from the ashes of laid-off foreign journalists with the admirable mission of saving foreign reporting. Its for-profit model is simple: engineer a vast network of freelance journalists to produce website of international news, funded mainly by advertisers and syndication arrangements. In many ways, GlobalPost has been a standout success, winning a prestigious George Polk Award and an Overseas Press Club Award, among others. It has also made a diligent attempt to support its staff in the field, but like other freelance-powered organizations, it has struggled to provide a living wage for its correspondents, and in some instances proper support.

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Illustration by Sonia Kretschmar

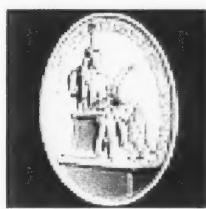


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**Beware the wolf?**

I believe that Michael Meyer's story ("Should journalism worry about content marketing?" November/December) is an accurate survey of the "brand journalism" landscape. I am a Columbia J-School grad who put in eight years at *Forbes* and now writes and edits GE Reports, GE's online magazine. For us, success comes down to value and quality of information. Like any decent media outlet, you have to give readers something they find valuable in order to get them to start reading (and subscribe!). There are many good "brand" stories that deserve to be told. Why not tell them? Let readers decide if they are any good. They are a smart bunch.

Tomas Kellner

*Comment on CJR.org*

We live in a world of bombarded branding thanks to the internet and I do not believe there is any escape. I worked in the last century for several publications that started as journalistic adventures but have evolved sadly into content branding operations. The pisser is that they are flourishing today!

You can change the content, but you can't change the fact that friggin *everything* is a hustle (read: branding operation) in this new lost world.

The end of it is likely when we either all are treading water or are zombiefied from WWIII fallout.... Well, there's always football to take our minds off of the much bigger hustles ...

Larry Evans

*Comment on CJR.org*

Very disappointing to see a piece in CJR so blithely accept and apparently justify the unwholesome fact that "boundaries between editorial and advertising in journalism newsrooms aren't what they used to be." Maybe you need that pivot in an article that glorifies a private company's PR efforts, but this line of reasoning is barely above the schoolroom excuse, "He did it first"—as if that makes it all okay.



**There are many good 'brand' stories that deserve to be told. Why not tell them?**

C'mon, guys, get a grip. I know CJR wants to be relevant in the fast-changing media landscape, but throwing bedrock journalistic principles under the bus is not the way to do it.

Most sincerely,

Mark Hertsgaard

*Comment on CJR.org*

I wouldn't say CJR is accepting and justifying the blurred line between church and state; it's merely explaining how media outlets get paid.

Bedrock journalistic principles aren't being thrown under the bus. More like they're being appropriated by the very companies who pay to have their ads or content published in magazine, newspaper, TV, whatever. Journalistic principles are being dangled by puppet strings—Mike Meyer here is trying to get you, the media consumer, to recognize who might be the puppet master. Frankly, I think it would be naive for CJR *not* to publish such a story. Good on Mr. Meyer

for mapping how far the tentacles of corporate interests reach into editorial.

I used to think of myself as a journalist, until I started working at a trade magazine publisher where this flavor of content marketing is what keeps the lights on. I'd be alarmed if CJR didn't cover this as in depth as this piece.

Nick Wright

*Comment on CJR.org*

**Information inequality**

"Vice Media has asked editors to assess any possible adverse impact on advertisers." ("Who cares who's a journalist?" November/December) Yep, that sounds like a vice. Or is that vise?

Corporations can do what they want in terms of content marketing, but at some point, the journalism profession/industry will have to define, and yes, promote itself as being a fair, objective, comprehensive news source. A reporter is not just another hired gun or mouthpiece.

There's room for everyone, but not all information is equal and it's up to journalists, not just readers and advertisers, to make that value judgment.

Sharon Geltner

*Comment on CJR.org*

**Covering the untidy**

Photographer Tyler Hicks and writer Jared Malsin are fortunate that they did not have to cover World War II if their experiences and comments on the tragic death from an errant shell of four young Palestinian boys reflect their acute sensitivities. ("Under the Gun," November/December). Their hearts might have bled to death. Of all of humankind's many follies, war is the most untidy.

Google Coventry and London, England; Rotterdam, Holland; Dresden, Germany; Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan; and countless other cities, towns, and villages that were virtually obliterated along with their men, women, and children, in some cases to intimidate the world just by showing that it could be done.

Their sympathy for the boys is well-placed but their bias in favor of the Palestinians overlooks the realities of a complex situation. Not even a passing mention of the Hamas guerillas raining poorly aimed rockets on Jewish settlements from firing emplacements near and inside civilian centers and United Nations offices.

"There are now [Gaza] kids eight years old, nine years old, who have lived through three wars," the article concludes. There are Israelis now in their 60s, 70s, 80s who have never known anything but war from forces determined to obliterate the country and its citizens of all ages and genders.

Marvin Brown  
Columbus, OH  
WWII Army combat veteran

### Between the lines

The November/December issue was a great read from front to back! I was especially pleased to see Lawrence Lannahan's piece ("Ferguson before #Ferguson") about the WYPR series, "The Lines Between Us." As a Baltimore resident and WYPR addict, I listened to most of it. It was a great piece of radio journalism, worthy of the DuPont Award it received. The series generously cited the work of another Baltimorean, Antero Pietila, whose blockbuster book on bigotry and residential segregation, "Not in My Neighborhood," explores discriminatory real estate practices that darkened the dreams of millions of Americans to own their own homes. Pietila, a 35-year reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*, worked 10 years on the book, which became a hit largely through "word of mouth" on Facebook. It was assigned reading for the Baltimore County school board, of which I am a member.

On a sour note, the cover story, "The wolf at the door," about content marketing, was a fascinating piece, but "as it's name ... suggests" (p. 24) and "who I had previously seen playing with her dog" (p. 28) grated like nails on a blackboard. I hope CJR hasn't cut back on copy editors. So many newspapers, *The Baltimore Sun* included, have done so.

Mike Bowler  
Baltimore, MD

### Judge the author by his book

Excellent review ("Pundit, heal thyself," November/December) on a book by someone who's disappointed time and again with [Chuck Todd's] "balanced" reporting. He's bought into the Beltway shtick.

Craig Hattersley  
Comment on CJR.org

Perspective! Remember that Todd is a media "celebrity" in this new age of corporate journalism. Celebrity has its own rewards and sustaining the flow is

paramount to most participants in that game. Why does Chuck Todd participate in the "journalism for fun and profit" game? Because that's where the money is. Fourth Estate? More like Fifth Column. Jack

Comment on CJR.org

### Correction

In "Pundit, heal thyself," from the November/December issue, we incorrectly referred to Barack Obama as the 43rd president of the United States. He is the 44th president. CJR

### NOTES FROM ONLINE STORIES

As reporters we've all been there ("What happened at Rolling Stone was not Jackie's fault," December 2014). You get a great tip that on its face seems like a blockbuster story. You do some interviews, you write your lede. Then you begin getting the other side of the story and your blockbuster tip begins to unravel. Then you find out the "tipster" has shopped the same "blockbuster" to 10 other reporters who all did some legwork and found out it was false. Blockbuster dead.

The problem comes when you are so convinced you have a great story that you don't do the requisite legwork to determine its validity. It sounds like that's what happened here. Erdely seems to have been so happy with her scoop she didn't want to let the facts spoil it.

We've all also been in a position where we're asked for some reason not to get another side of the story. The answer to this is simple: Either I get the other side or I don't do the story.

This reporter showed a massive amount of negligence in her reporting and has damaged a clearly troubled young woman—not to mention victims and their advocates across the country—in the process. There's a reason we're trained to be skeptical: Because there are *always* two sides to the story and there are *always* gray areas. Hopefully the next time this woman is commissioned to write a story, her work is viewed with the same skepticism she should have showed when listening to Jackie. Former reporter

Well, it depends. I worked in a cross section of journalism and children's media relations for several years. I wrote primarily for the Web. "Plagiarism"? What's that? ("Journalism has a plagiarism problem. But it's not the one you'd expect," November 2014).

If you bounce between realms of consumer interest (e.g., finance regulation, poverty research, TV ratings analysis, spending trends), you'll eventually come to identify that there are different standards of citation and sourcing efficacy for daily reporting as well as for in-depth, longform commentary. The threshold for original ideas is not the same.

New-media reporting has evolved extraordinarily fast. Our definitions or assumptions for what qualifies as integrity-driven work, within the interests or domains swallowed by this drive, however, have not evolved as quickly.

A couple of other points. Ben Smith says that "[p]resenting someone else's words as your own is such a basic form of dishonesty." Well, to be frank, this is the 21st century; that's not a precise definition of plagiarism or dishonesty so much as it is marketing and publicity. Massaging the context of a topic or debate such that the reader can derive specific insight from the discussion with the same (even if identically worded) facts isn't dishonest writing, it's clever writing. And depending on what consumer interest one serves/covers, it's highly rewarded, clever writing. Aaron B.

# Currents

## The hacks we love to hate

### Domestic Sales

Film: **Citizenfour**  
Journalist: Glenn Greenwald

\$1.5m

Film: **Rosewater**  
Journalist: Maziar Bahari

\$2.7m

Film: **Kill the Messenger**  
Journalist: Gary Webb

\$2.4m

Film: **The Fifth Estate**  
Journalist: Julian Assange

\$3.3m

Once, Hollywood painted journalists as heroes in films such as *Citizen Kane* and *Deadline, USA*. Then, with *Network*, *Hero*, and *Wag The Dog*, they were a professional elite in a morally bankrupt industry. Today, filmmakers take a more he said-she said approach, portraying noble and amoral reporters alike. The verdict of filmgoers, however, is less evenhanded. Of all the journalists on the silver screen of late, the sleaziest have drawn the biggest crowds. *Nightcrawler*—in which a cameraman played by Jake Gyllenhaal chooses to set up the culprits in a triple murder for a shoot-out and car chase, so he can get better footage, instead of immediately reporting them to the cops—has outgrossed *Kill The Messenger*, the true story of tenacious but tragic muckraker Gary Webb, a dozen times over. By that measure, George Clooney's upcoming *Hack Attack*, on the phone-hacking exploits of Rupert Murdoch's British tabloids, should fare well.

—Chris Ip

\$28.7m

Source: boxofficemojo.com, as of week of Dec. 1

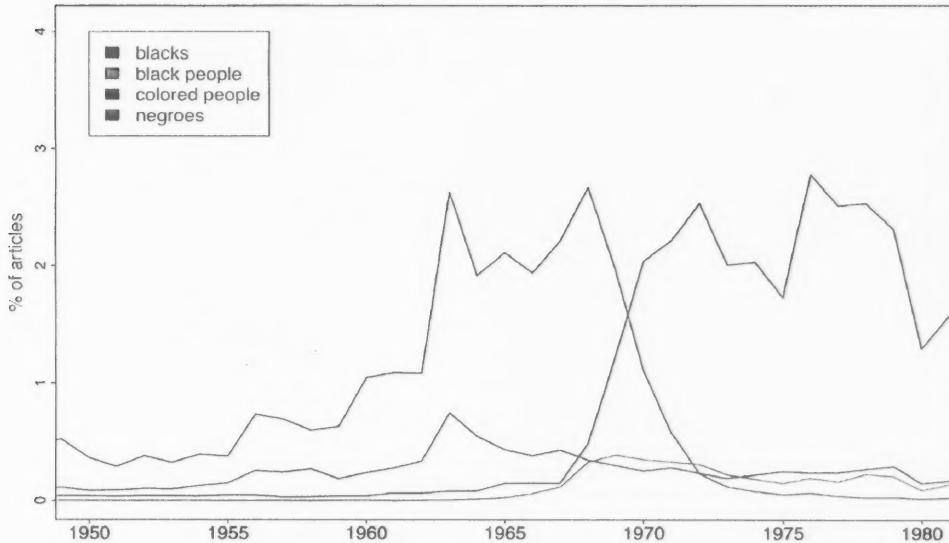
# Talking race

Nicholas Subtirelu, a PhD student in linguistics at Georgia State University, was thinking about his own generation's rejection of once-acceptable racial labels when he decided to study the changing use of those labels in journalism. More specifically, how racial labels have changed in *The New York Times* between 1851 and 2014, which is the timespan of the *Times'* online Chronicle tool that allowed Subtirelu to track the paper's historical usage of various

words. "I think the changes in racial labeling practices over time really impresses upon us that racial groups are social constructs, and not straightforward reflections of biology," Subtirelu says. "Journalists play an important role in shaping how we categorize other people." Below are selections from Subtirelu's research.

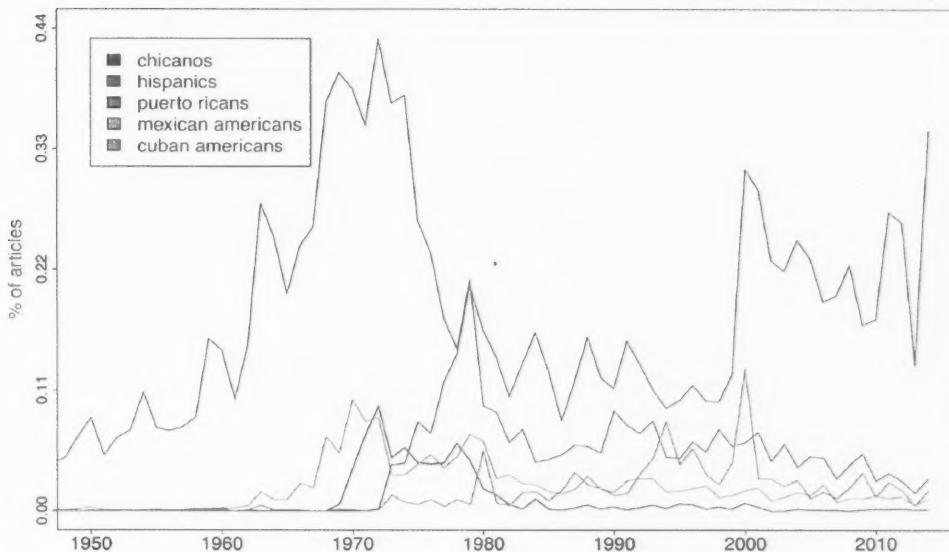
—Lene Bech Sillesen

Shift in NYT racial labels during Civil Rights Movement



Subtirelu found two radical shifts in the *Times'* labelling of black men and women from 1851 to today: during the civil war and reconstruction period, and during the civil rights movement. This graph shows a dramatic change in word use from the 1950s to 1970s that suggests a new awareness among journalists. In the 1990s, the *Times* began to use the term African-Americans, which remains common today, along with blacks, black people, and people of color.

NYT use of terms for national groups and racial category "Hispanics"



Labels for Latinos only began appearing in the *Times* in the 1960s and 1970s, and gradually increased in frequency, as Latinos gained political influence. Country-specific terms like Puerto Ricans were eventually replaced by umbrella terms, especially Hispanics and Latinos. Such terms remain dominant today, although the majority (51 percent) of Latinos say they prefer to be defined by country of origin or heritage, according to a 2011 Pew study. The *Times'* shift from country-specific to umbrella terms is an example of how the media can reinforce understandings of diverse peoples as belonging to a single, broad category, Subtirelu says.



**Flower power** The flower room at High Country Healing, a dispensary in Colorado Springs. Growers there inspect each plant at least once a day.

## High Times If it's weed, it leads

Cable news is doing drugs. On November 30, MSNBC began airing a six-part documentary series on the fledgling weed industry, *Pot Barons of Colorado*. Its debut came a little over a month after CNN unveiled plans for its own potumentary, *High Profits*. Both shows illustrate not only cable news' new penchant for longform, but also how entrepreneurs intend to cash in on Colorado's green rush. "This is a massive industry in the making," says Gary Cohen, executive producer, writer, and narrator of the MSNBC series. "These people are competing for the same giant checks."

CNN's eight-part series will feature a duo's quest to become marijuana moguls, while "Pot Barons" introduces viewers to a handful of small business owners—present-day 49ers—including one aiming to create the "Costco of marijuana" and another the "Apple store of weed." "We knew we'd also come into contact with all the other aspects of the story—the customers, the culture, everything," adds Scott Hooker, senior executive producer of longform programming at MSNBC. "That all found its way in through the business angle."

Cohen, who began shooting for the show in February, said the tenor of media coverage of Colorado's nascent market has already changed since prohibition ended in January 2014, from general skepticism of legalization to focused skepticism of specific regulations or business practices. And just as entrepreneurs see the new industry as a potentially lucrative venture, so too do news organizations eager to tell that story. "This is as ideal a canvas I've experienced in my career as a storyteller," Cohen says.

"Wherever you live, if you're interested in this story—and a lot of people seem to be—there are local angles," he says. "One town at a time. America is changing on this."

—David Uberti

## Language Corner Nipped in the bud

Would you tell a friend something like, "I'd really like to get into the *burgeoning* pot business"? Probably not, we'd bet. If you wanted to get into that business, you'd probably call it "flourishing," "expanding," or even "growing" (though that last could lead to misunderstandings about what you meant).

Yet nearly every month, more than a thousand "burgeonings" bloom in news articles across our land, referring to things just starting out, exploding, expanding, or otherwise getting bigger.

Our objection to "burgeon" has little to do with its definition; it has everything to do with its lack of use in everyday conversations. "Burgeon" is journalese, a word that we like to use in print even though our audience rarely says it aloud. It belongs with "decrey," "mull," and other such words.

In its traditional sense, "burgeon" means "to put forth buds, shoots, etc.; sprout," as Webster's *New World College Dictionary* says. In other words, it's a new thing that is growing, not something established. The pot business in Colorado can be said to be "burgeoning," but Apple's iPhone business is better described as "growing" or "flourishing," because it's been around for a while.

While it's true that WNW also defines "burgeon" as "to grow or develop rapidly; expand; proliferate; flourish," that definition was added only a few decades ago. And even though Garner's *Modern American Usage* lists "burgeon" at Stage 4 of the five-stage Language-Change Index, meaning only "die-hard snoots" would object to its usage, even Garner's says "the word preferably refers to growth at early stages, not to full-blown expansion."

More important, it's usually better to use words your audience might. So let "burgeon" die on the vine, and find a more useful word.

—Merrill Perlman

# Gone, but hardly forgotten

In May 2014, the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that individuals have a right to request that personal information be removed from online search results. The so-called “right to be forgotten” mainly affects Google, the dominant search engine in Europe, whose job it is to evaluate the requests.

While the rule has been sharply criticized, not least by Google, its reach is limited. For now, it only applies to Google Europe domains. And information that is clearly in the public interest, or related to public figures, is not supposed to be subject to removal. The person making the request must prove his identity and persuasively argue that the information is “inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant.” Even then, the links will only fail to appear when someone searches for that person’s name. So, for instance, if you ever filed for bankruptcy, a general search about bankruptcy in your community would likely still turn up your own case, even if you had successfully “been forgotten” under this ruling.

Last summer, Google began notifying media outlets when links to their sites are removed, but not revealing who made request or why, which, ironically, has prompted new coverage of the policy that often includes links to the affected content. In other words, be careful what you ask for. Here’s a sampling of links that have either been removed, or that someone has attempted to have removed.

—Lene Bech Sillesen

## Successful (sort of) requests

Stories from newspaper *La Vanguardia* about Mario Costeja Gonzalez, a Spanish citizen who had real estate seized for non-payment of social-security taxes.

A German newspaper article about a rape.

Three 2010 articles from *The Guardian* about former Scottish Premier League referee Dougie McDonald, who lied about his reasons for granting a penalty in a match and was forced to resign. Following complaints (from *The Guardian* and others) that the information was in the public interest, Google restored the links.

Blog posts by BBC economics editor Robert Peston about how former Merrill Lynch CEO Stanley O’Neal was forced out. Peston publicly questioned the deletion, arguing that O’Neal, the only person named in the article, should not be allowed to hide information relevant to the public. Google then clarified that the request had been made by someone named in the comments section.

A routine 1998 *New York Times* feature about a theater production of “Villa Villa.”

A 2011 story in the *Telegraph* about Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik’s 1500-page “war plan.”

## 182,604

total link-removal requests Google has received from European citizens under the right to be forgotten

## 59.5

percentage of evaluated link-removal requests that were denied by Google

## 4,565

links removed to Facebook, the domain most affected by the rule

## 77.7

the highest percentage of Google-denied requests from one country: Bulgaria

## 52.1

the highest percentage of granted requests from one country: Austria

Source: [google.com/transparencyreport/removals/europeprivacy](http://google.com/transparencyreport/removals/europeprivacy)

## Rejected (sort of) requests

- A 2010 *Washington Post* concert review of Croatian pianist Dejan Lazic, whose performance was deemed “cartoon-like.”
- Four articles about “embarrassing content” posted to the internet by an English media professional, who filed a request for removal with Google.

# Safe haven

Cable-news channels often provide soft landings for former or wanna-be elected officials, typically featuring them as political analysts. But just a few contributors have left a station to seek elected office, only to return to that same outlet after striking out. Pat Buchanan marched away from, and then retreated to, CNN's *Crossfire* not once but twice, when he ran for president in 1992 and 1996. More recently, Fox News has rehired a handful of former contributors after voters rejected them.

—David Uberti



**Angela McGlowan**

When *The Five*'s resident liberal, Bob Beckel, mentioned Mississippi's 1st District in May 2008, McGlowan responded, "That's my district, and I'm going there soon to beat your Democrat colleague, honey." She kept her position until February 2010, when she formally announced her campaign, only to finish third in the GOP primary on June 1. Within three weeks, McGlowan was back at Fox.



**Pete Snyder**

Snyder's 2012 Election-Day analysis sounded like a stump speech: "That's the problem with this president. ... [T]here's been next to no outreach to the other side. ... He's been solely about the liberal base, and that's why his policies have been disastrous for this economy." Three weeks later, Snyder announced his candidacy for lieutenant governor of Virginia, and was declared a "huge, rising star" by a Fox host. He lost in May 2013, and Fox rehired him in December 2013.



**Liz Cheney**

On June 25, 2013, just weeks before launching her Senate bid, Cheney practiced her campaign-trail rhetoric on *Hannity*: "This president is going after the coal industry. You know, I'm from Wyoming, and people there are starting to say, this isn't just a war on coal, it's a war on Wyoming and all the other energy-producing states in this country." Cheney withdrew from the race in January 2014, and was back at Fox by April.



**Scott Brown**

On March 6, a little over a week before he announced an exploratory committee for a New Hampshire Senate bid, Brown derided Sen. Jeanne Shaheen's (D-NH) affiliation with Obamacare: "The real issue is you have people like ... Shaheen and others who are hiding behind these frivolous actions to try to make people think that they're out there fighting to protect them. They're the ones that rammed [Obamacare] through." Fox ended Brown's contract that month, only to rehire him two weeks after his three-point loss to Shaheen.

# Is that you?

For as little as \$200, NewsBios provides “reputation insurance” to PR agencies and corporations preparing for interviews. It compiles dossiers on journalists, scouring obituaries, social media, real-estate records, and past stories, and claims to turn up worldview-shaping experiences. The rub is in a disclaimer: NewsBios doesn’t verify the information found online. CJR asked three journalists to factcheck excerpts from their files.

—Chris Ip

**Dyan Machan**  
Contributing Editor, Barron's

#### Bio includes

- Hudson Valley home address and valuation
- A reputation for “charm and sense of humor”
- The names of Machan's dog, Alice, and cat, Aad

#### Excerpt

“Ms. Machan is a registered Democrat. Public records indicate that in 2007, she contributed to both Barack Obama's (\$500) and Hillary Clinton's (\$1,000) presidential campaigns.”

#### Response

“I found the stuff pretty weird and only partially true. I gave to Barack Obama's campaign and I believe I gave more than the amount listed. I never gave to Hillary Clinton's campaign. The real estate information is basically correct, and publicly available. I do not have a cat but do have a dog named Alice. It is possible this last bit came from social media. While I seldom post, my husband is an avid poster. As for charm and humor, that is certainly subjective.”

**Margot Sanger-Katz**  
Healthcare reporter for The Upshot, NYT

#### Bio includes

- Enthusiasm for popcorn
- A note that none of Sanger-Katz's stories have appeared on A1 of Times.
- Attention to an August story that required three corrections

#### Excerpt

“One revealing snippet from Ms. Sanger-Katz's writing ... is her choice of the word 'we' (versus 'they') ... As a journalist, she is not charged with also being a 'consumer advocate,' although by using 'we' she groups herself (and perhaps her colleagues at The Upshot) in with worried advocates.”

#### Response

“There's nothing in here that seems difficult to get. It looks like it's mostly LinkedIn, some news reports about my hiring, and my public social media profiles. A few details come from going into the back pages of a Google search for my name. Of course, I am the only person with my name, so I'm probably easier to Google than many other reporters.”

**Ankit Ajmera**  
Correspondent, Thomson Reuters

#### Bio includes

- Distinction between Reuters' Bangalore “farm team” and “major league” newsrooms
- Photo claiming to be a view from his apartment window

#### Excerpt

“To the extent that financial journalism can be scripted... Reuters' correspondents in India are 'programmed' to cover the companies on their beats. ... [T]he questions that Mr. Ajmera will ask during interviews with U.S. corporate executives ... will be very similar to other Bangalore-based correspondents.”

#### Response

“I don't think 'programmed' is the right word when it comes to covering companies. Most journalists who join the organization are required to undergo some form of training. The picture was shot at the Times of India building in Mumbai. NewsBios must have taken it from my Twitter profile.”

## Know your audience

It's not just journalists whose quirks and interests are being monitored: Profiles of their audiences are now accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

In November, online-market-research firm YouGov launched a new app that profiles the target audiences of everything from Facebook to the Bible. The data sets are compiled from over 200,000 adult YouGov members in the UK, with plans to include US audiences in 2015. The basic app is free, but subscribers to the professional tool have access to connected data sets.

The app doesn't profile average readers and viewers but rather reflects what differentiates, say, a reader of *The New York Times* from a reader of *The Guardian* or *The Economist*.

The quintessential English reader of *The New York Times* (online) is a politically right-leaning male media professional who lists among his top hobbies and activities: “sitting around doing as little as possible.” The quintessential reader (also male) of *The Economist* (print) works in business or finance, describes himself as occasionally arrogant, and loves the movie *The Wolf of Wall Street*. All according to the YouGov app, of course.

Here's what the quintessential reader of *The Guardian* (print) looks like, according to the app:

—Lene Bech Sillesen



## The public interest

*Defying the White House, from the Pentagon Papers to Snowden*

ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE CONVERSATIONS I HAD AT THE NEW YORK Times was with Punch Sulzberger. I came to his chairman emeritus office to interview him about the Pentagon Papers for a speech I was giving. Punch recalled that right before the *Times* published the first stories based on Daniel Ellsberg's leak of the classified Vietnam study, he was gardening at his weekend estate. He saw a helicopter approaching and thought, "They are coming to take me away." Although Punch was being light-hearted, his fear that the *Times* would be prosecuted for publishing the Pentagon Papers was very real. The US Supreme Court had not yet issued its landmark decision barring prior restraint of the press.

In the summer of 2013, I worried about how ironclad that decision still was. Alan Rusbridger, the editor of *The Guardian*, with whom I had worked on the WikiLeaks material, had decided to entrust me and the *Times* with a massive trove of Snowden documents involving the British Intelligence service, GCHQ. *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* had already, much to my chagrin, published huge exclusives from the Snowden materials, beginning with the explosive details about PRISM, a secret, mass-surveillance, data-mining program that the NSA began in 2007. I was sick at heart that the *Times* had been scooped, and told Alan so. Now he was approaching me because he needed the GCHQ materials safeguarded because he feared, rightfully, that the British authorities would seize them. Soon, via a trusted courier, a package arrived in my office. Immediately, I placed the package in a safe in the *Times'* legal department.

Given the massive intrusion of the government's snooping, I viewed the Snowden materials as even more consequential than the Pentagon Papers, which revealed significant government deception. In this case, too, the government had lied about the scope of its eavesdropping programs.

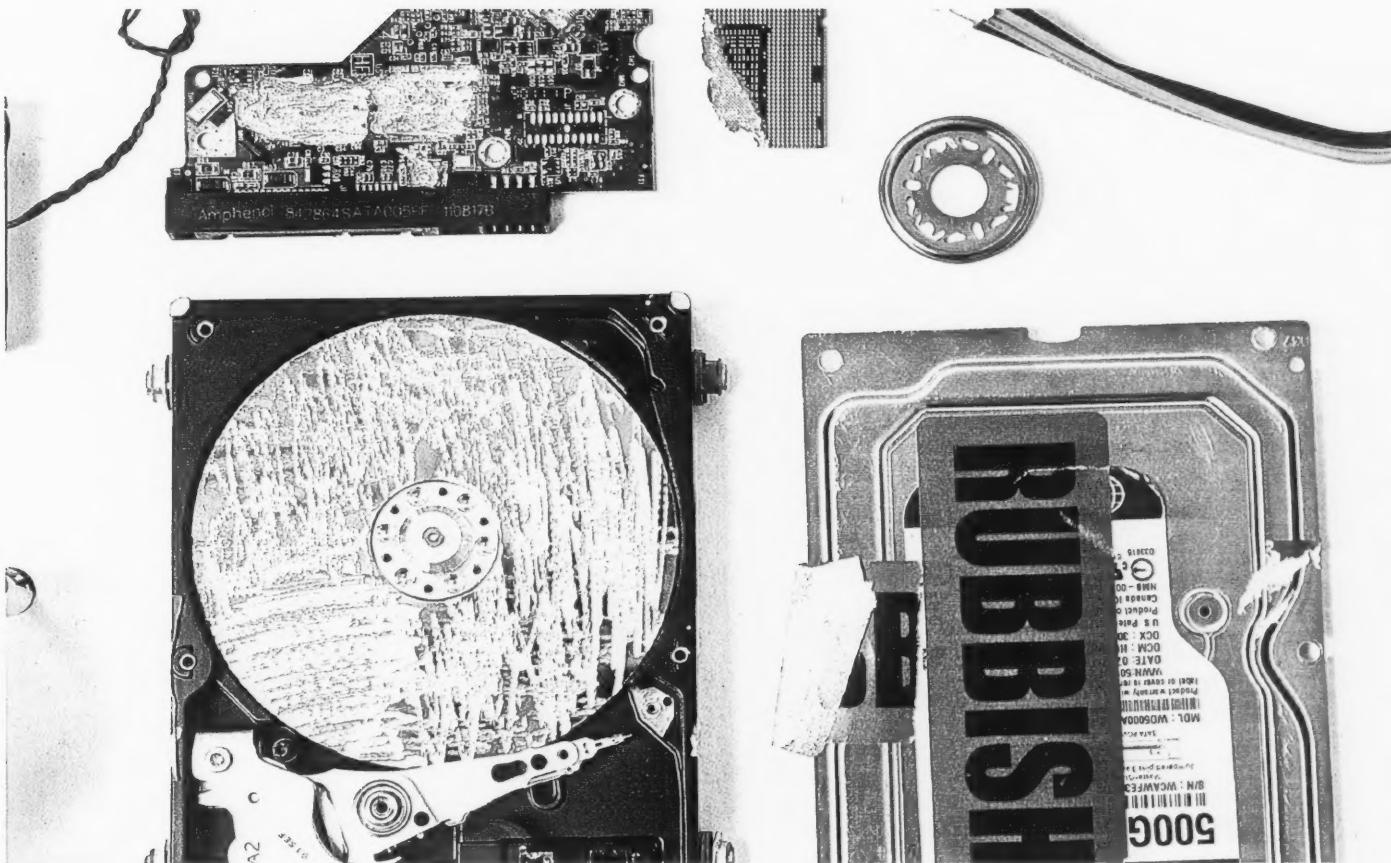
No helicopters were circling above my office, but I was worried, despite reassurances from the *Times'* in-house counsel, that the US government might try to prevent us from publishing stories based on the Snowden package. I wanted independent advice. Secretly, I retained a lawyer, a friend from college days, to review the case law. Bruce Birenboim, a litigation partner at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, was also savvy about the Obama administration and how inhospitable to press freedom it had become, as evidenced by the James Risen case, among others. His brief concluded that prior restraint was unlikely, but also said, ominously, "to the extent that publication of the material can be argued to violate the Espionage Act (or some other comparable statute) the government's case is improved," and noted that the Obama administra-

tion "has been more aggressive than expected" in moving against national security leaks.

It made me uneasy when the British ambassador to the United States asked me to come to Washington, DC, for a meeting at his embassy. Ever so politely, as I expected, I was being asked to return the GCHQ documents. I was careful not to confirm that we had the Snowden documents. Two days after the visit, I called to say that if we had such documents, we would not relinquish them. In the meantime, the British authorities had supervised the destruction of the materials held at *The Guardian*. When I had dinner with Alan a week or so later, he showed me a souvenir. Out of his pocket came a shard of computer file that had been hacked to pieces during the document purge.

Could such a thing ever happen at the *Times*? On the same afternoon that I visited the British embassy, I went to see James Clapper, the director of National Intelligence, to protest the way the Obama administration was dealing with the *Times*, with its criminal-leak investigations and frequent requests that we withhold stories about national security from publication. Clapper's back was troubling him, and he had come to the office in order to meet with me. Surprisingly, he did not ask whether the *Times* was working on stories based on the Snowden trove. I told him that from now on, any requests to hold stories had to come from President Obama or his National Security Adviser. At least they had a constitutional duty to uphold the First Amendment. "It's first for a reason," I told Clapper, who barely restrained himself from eye-rolling as I invoked the Founders and their fervent belief that the press was a bulwark protecting the people from overly centralized government authority. I was pleased with my little constitutional lesson.

In the Age of Snowden, any editor with a robust national security team has to have the stomach to fight the White House. Bill Keller, my predecessor as executive editor, had gone to the White House to hear President Bush warn that the *Times* would have blood on its hands if it published the original story about the NSA's warrantless and



**'If you publish, you will be helping Al Qaeda,' said congresswoman Jane Harman of the *Times'* plans to publish a story about the NSA's illegal wiretapping.**

then-illegal eavesdropping. Democrats, too, had called me, the managing editor, to implore that the *Times* not publish. "This is the crown jewel in our national security arsenal," Senator Jay Rockefeller argued in a phone call. "If you publish, you will be helping Al Qaeda," said congresswoman Jane Harman.

Keller had decided to hold the story for more than a year, in part because of such national security concerns. But our reporting had sharpened over time, as had the urgency of the story. I was relieved when the story went up on the Web. But Snowden, still angry over the *Times'* delay, decided to punish the *Times* by giving his documents to *The*

*Guardian* and *The Washington Post* instead. I was sick over being scooped and frequently reminded Rusbridger about our mutually beneficial collaboration on the WikiLeaks stories. And finally, he had come calling.

Soon we were publishing consequential stories based on the Snowden material, including a front-page story on how encryption had been rendered useless by NSA snooping. Reporters dealing with the material became conversant with how to use encryption to protect their communications. The *Times* had learned valuable lessons about publishing stories based on vast national security leaks. During WikiLeaks, we had formed a secret

**Disc error** The remnants of *The Guardian* computers used to store leaked Snowden documents. Under threat of punitive legal action by the British government, the paper's editors agreed to destroy computers.

working group away from the main newsroom, and learned how to keep classified documents in a very secure manner. We were extremely careful not to publish details that could, even inadvertently, endanger lives.

With the Snowden material, we were even more careful. A tiny group worked in a windowless storage room that was kept under security surveillance. Cellphones, which can be used as eavesdropping devices by the NSA, were not allowed in the room. Because the group was basically confined to a cramped, airless room, I made sure to take care of frequent deliveries of food and treats. I noticed that the team was gaining weight.

During the Bush and Obama administrations, I dealt on more than a dozen occasions with requests from the White House that we not publish stories based on classified national security leaks. When the *Times* was asked to withhold information from readers because of national security concerns, such requests almost always involved difficult editorial decisions. Usually the government's concerns about the sensitivity of the material were valid and worthy of careful consideration. There are circumstances where information, when published, could endanger lives or compromise ongoing military or diplomatic operations. *The Guardian*, rightfully, had redacted pages from an NSA training manual turned over by Snowden because they revealed too much about certain ongoing operations. Snowden himself has said he was careful in what documents he chose for disclosure so as not to needlessly harm intelligence gathering.

There was always a difficult balancing test on what and whether to publish, in which reporters and editors weigh the concerns of the government against the press' duty to inform the public. Is the public better off knowing about the government's secret massive eavesdropping programs? The answer is an unqualified yes. Has publication of these stories harmed national security? So far, the government has offered scant evidence that it has.

In the Pentagon Papers case, which covered the *Times* and *Punch Sulzberger* in their greatest glory, Solicitor General Erwin Griswold argued that publication of the Ellsberg materials did grave harm to national security. Years later, in a speech, Griswold admitted that he knew of no actual instance of harm to the country from the publication of the Pentagon Papers. **CJR**

JILL ABRAMSON is a former executive editor of The New York Times. This piece is a chapter in *Journalism After Snowden: The Future of Free Press in the Surveillance State*, a forthcoming book from Columbia University Press. The book is part of the Journalism After Snowden initiative, a yearlong series of events and projects from the Tow Center for Digital Journalism in collaboration with CJR. The initiative is funded by The Tow Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

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## LEARNING CURVE DAVID UBERTI

### *The once and future city*

*Why the media don't get Detroit—and why it matters*

IN DETROIT, THE AMERICAN DREAM HAS BECOME AN AMERICAN PARADOX: Corporate-backed revitalization downtown belies the continued deterioration of sprawling neighborhoods of single-family homes; a fledgling creative class masks the ongoing plight of what was once a massive working class; white newcomers trickle in by choice, just as many black natives have no choice but to stay where they are.

What's that? It doesn't sound like the up-from-the-ashes, post-industrial renaissance Detroit you've been hearing about of late? "The Post-Post-Apocalyptic Detroit," as *The New York Times Magazine* described it last July.

For that matter, whatever happened to the bombed-out, font-of-ruin porn Detroit that the media endlessly eulogized just a few short years ago as a harbinger of American decline? The once-promising mayor sacked for corruption; the once-vaunted auto industry falling flat; the once-crowded metropolis given over to vacant lots and urban farms; a once-prosperous city now broke. (Several outlets, including Bloomberg, wrote about 50,000 stray dogs "replacing residents, menacing humans who remain and overwhelming the city's ability to find them homes or peaceful deaths." A study eventually found fewer than 3,000 canines throughout Detroit's 139 square miles. Oh well.)

The fact is, Detroit has been in decline for 60 years, and the many and varied reasons for that decline stretch back 100. As it emerges now from bankruptcy, there are indeed positive signs, though a lot of them have been attributed to the local billionaires who've bought up much of downtown. Yet the media narrative about Detroit has never really captured the full story—of either urban suffering or post-industrial promise. "We have a tendency in journalism of trying to see things too black and white," said Ron Fournier, a *National Journal* columnist and Motown native whose daughter works for *The Detroit News*. "The Republicans are evil, or the Republicans are great. Detroit is undergoing a rebirth, or Detroit will never come back. Life is all about the gray, and journalism is all about the gray. I've always seen Detroit just like I try to see politics: It never was as bad as people told me it was. And it's not as good as they say it is now."

I've long grappled with the contradictions at the heart of Detroit's story, and not only because I spent the better part of the past year writing about struggling American cities for *The Guardian*. My Italian grandfather came to Detroit as a POW in World War II, and my father still works there as a physician. I grew up in a suburb 10 miles west of city limits, and I recently had a yearlong fellowship at Columbia Journalism School reporting on the city's efforts to save its neighborhoods.

Motown isn't alone, of course. There are plenty of American cities similarly in decline—economically, demographically, infrastructurally—or suffering from its aftereffects. They span the country, from Camden, NJ, to Flint, MI, to Stockton, CA. Atlantic City is the latest to be put on “deathwatch”—*The Washington Post* declared as much last July—as a spate of casino closures has drawn swarms of out-of-town reporters (including me).

None of their stories can be easily fitted into the media's need for unambiguous winners and losers that Fournier described. As in Detroit, hope and despair stand shoulder to shoulder in these cities. What's more, few newsrooms have the mandate—to say nothing of the resources—to really understand what went wrong in the first place, to excavate how local circumstances interacted with larger political and socioeconomic forces over the course of decades.

More important, this tale of decline is not a story that Americans want to hear, or have ever really encountered before. America doesn't decline; it rises toward its destiny. But increasingly, this story is one we can't afford to ignore. More than 80 percent of the US population now lives in urban areas. Healthy cities are engines of economic growth, innovation, and creativity. The media have marveled at the downfall of places like Detroit, but whether these declining cities will ever regain the vitality that we once associated with them remains an open question.

**STRUGGLING CITIES ARE OFTEN FOUND** in the Rust Belt, far removed from national media concentrated along the coasts. Coverage tends to be sporadic, and centers on their most glaring failures. The narratives that emerge are of ghost towns and zombie subdivisions. These stories are compelling and based on real hardships. But

they typically do little to explain how the cities got that way, let alone what's possible in terms of reversing their fortunes.

In some larger cities such as Buffalo and Cleveland, meanwhile, the idea of renewal has begun to drive more of the media storyline. Such rosy analyses typically lack historical or geographical context, focusing on one neighborhood or one segment of the population at a time. Micro-developers may have bought up a handful of vacant homes, and new businesses may be sprouting in downtown areas. But such developments are happening amid a large, diverse metro area; their impact is easily overstated. They are not typically the indicators of wholesale resurrection that they become in a news story.

“Trend pieces and roundup pieces about revitalization or startups or cool hipster breweries are very popular to write,” said Anne Trubek, founder of the Cleveland-based Belt Magazine,

**The ashes** Part of the old Packard Automotive Plant in Detroit, one of the city's thousands of abandoned buildings that have been left to scavengers and graffiti artists.



ANDREW BURTON / GETTY IMAGES

which publishes level-headed longform on the Rust Belt. "And then there's the ruins, though people are less interested in the ruins nowadays. Both these things are happening and both these things are true. But we try to integrate both into the same story as opposed to bouncing between poles."

Those poles are indeed seductive, both for parachuting reporters who need a narrative that can be distilled into a 1,500-word feature or a 90-second spot, and for faraway editors on tight budgets. Local media can sometimes do a better job of dissecting their cities' complicated realities—Motown's period of urban crisis produced some excellent work—but those takes rarely

shape the national conversation. When it comes to how we think about huge problems like urban decline, the narrative that matters is the one adopted by the national media. In Detroit, for instance, only *The New York Times* has consistently devoted the resources and the time necessary to really begin to digest the city's story. "There are many versions of this story all over the place," said Alison Mitchell, the *Times'* national editor. "In a way, Detroit is the best way to tell that story."

Startups like Belt have created new opportunities for journalists in depressed areas to reach audiences elsewhere. And some venerable brands have funneled more resources toward

coverage of cities, though not just American cities and with a greater focus on innovation than on decline. *The Atlantic* has brought its big-idea analysis into the urban arena with CityLab, while *The Nation* examines grassroots progressivism in its "Cities Rising" project. *The Guardian's* "Cities" vertical, for which I write occasional features, gives reporters the time and space to flesh out their analyses. Politico's "What Works" project has spotlighted urban reinvention, and its nascent magazine has given local writers a chance to dissect the politics of decline for a Beltway audience.

Most news organizations, however, face inherent challenges in reporting on faraway cities. Travel budgets are tight,

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"Trend pieces about revitalization or startups or cool hipster breweries are very popular to write," says Belt Magazine's Anne Trubek. 'And then there's the ruins.'

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**Deathwatch** A spate of casino closings has prompted the media to declare Atlantic City, and its famous boardwalk, the latest American city headed for ruin.



JEWEL SAMAD / GETTY IMAGES

and the demands of the nonstop news cycle make long stretches of on-the-ground reporting a hard sell. Then, of course, there is the pack effect. If everyone else is saying Detroit is dying, who wants to be the one to argue otherwise? When *Time* opened a bureau in Detroit in 2009, it was a valiant stab by a fading newsweekly to win the ruin-porn sweepstakes. It lasted a year.

Even absent the limitations of daily journalism, covering cities in decline is exceedingly difficult. In early fall, I spent six weeks on a feature about Atlantic City for *The Guardian*—enough time to read multiple books, peruse academic literature, and interview experts and leaders before even setting foot in town. But I worked the story on a freelance basis, in addition to my full-time job at CJR, meaning I crammed reporting into off-hours. Though *The Guardian* covered my travel expenses, I spent only two weekends within city limits. Any additional time in transit or on the ground simply wouldn't have made financial sense for me, and likely not for my editor, either. I attempted to compensate for that by focusing on the historical arc of the seaside resort—not just the most recent casino closure. But there's no doubt that the piece I wrote failed to fully capture what is happening in Atlantic City.

It is telling that national coverage of the legal aspects of Detroit's bankruptcy, which began in December 2013 and ended late last year, was solid. A story confined to finance, courtrooms, and political maneuvering is familiar—and one that plays to journalism's strengths. The city's larger autopsy has proven more difficult, especially so given that much of its huge metropolitan area remains vibrant. Parsing these intricacies requires deep knowledge of local history and a grasp of public policy.

The city's intersecting culture of cars and single-family homeownership, for example, led to the development of seemingly endless inner-city suburbs, an expansive geography that overstretched public infrastructure. Racist housing policies, from the New Deal onward, helped create a black underclass just as white Detroiters amassed wealth and then skipped town with it. The ensuing population decline hurt doubly, since speculative real-estate

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'Population loss, poverty, isolation—all these things are happening simultaneously,' says Stephen Henderson. 'It's really difficult to just pop in and grasp that complexity.'

development a century ago—namely the rampant subdivision of lots—left many emptied neighborhoods with an indecipherable web of property ownership and a patchwork of undevelopable land.

"Population loss, poverty, isolation—all these things are happening simultaneously," said Stephen Henderson, editorial-page editor of the *Detroit Free Press*, whose columns on Detroit were awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. Poverty is fundamentally different in shrinking cities like Detroit than it is in New York or Washington, he added. "It's hard to understand how big the city is and how that wreaks havoc on economic opportunity, especially for poor people. It's really difficult to just pop in and grasp that complexity."

Recent coverage has showcased Detroit's "booming bike industry" and a luxury watch company, among other vibrant, if relatively small, businesses. Motown was described as a "culinary oasis" and "the Bar City of the Year." Such monolithic descriptions of Detroit are similar to reporters' characterization of Brooklyn, where the artisanal doings in a handful of neighborhoods in a borough of 2.6 million people drive the media's narrative. "When you go to Slows Bar BQ"—a popular spot in the Corktown neighborhood—"and then make Pollyanna statements about how Detroit is a food oasis, that's almost as unhelpful as all those jokes for all those years," said Michael Jackman, managing editor of the Detroit weekly *Metro Times*. "It's like a pat on the head for being a plucky little city."

The way stories spread online only accentuates this black-white treatment, as social media generally reward extremes. My own *Guardian* feature on Detroit, in which I profiled an urban planner grappling with whether to

move elsewhere, was eventually titled, "The death of a great American city: Why does anybody live in Detroit?" I was proud of the piece's depth; I was also proud that it garnered nearly 700 comments and 10,000 social shares. While that exposure wouldn't have been possible without a sensational headline, I can't say what readers took away—the headline or my reporting.

A similar example can be gleaned from the popular website Business Insider, where a straight-laced Associated Press story about United Airlines ending service to Atlantic City ran beneath a particularly loud headline: "Here's Another Sign That Atlantic City Is Dying." That line of thinking, which has dominated coverage of the New Jersey town this year, doesn't sit well with Kris Worrell, executive editor of *The Press of Atlantic City*.

"As a breed, [journalists] have a healthy dose of skepticism," she told me. "And certainly if government officials argued that a place or company or any institution were perfect and happy, we would question that. My issue is that we don't apply that same level scrutiny to the opposite extreme, when something is painted in negative terms. We know, when we think about it, neither of those extremes is true."

That goes for any place that faces decline, from Atlantic City to Detroit. The reason the latter hasn't died is that countless people who love the city have fought like hell to save it. Their victories are real, but so are the massive challenges that remain. Understanding and respecting such contradictions is crucial for reporters who set out to explain what went wrong—as well as what's going right. **CJR**

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DAVID UBERTI is a Delacorte Fellow at CJR.

# Before it's gone

BY CHRISTIE CHISHOLM

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF FRIDAY SABBATH, KOLKATA'S MAGEN DAVID SYNAGOGUE is almost always closed. When the doors do open, occasionally someone enters, lights a candle, and prays. But mostly, the Magen David sits quietly. Upstairs, the balcony is lined with rows of dusty wooden chairs and pews, leftovers from the synagogue's last service in 2013. (The most recent, prior service took place in 1988.)

Soft, sanded footsteps do sometimes echo through the main hall, but they belong to the caretakers—who are Muslim and Hindu, not Jewish. These days, it's hard to find a Jew in Kolkata. The bustling capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) is home to some 14 million people. Most are Hindu, some are Muslim, and a few are Christian, Jain, and Buddhist. So small is Kolkata's Jewish population that it doesn't even appear in the city's census. Yet tucked into corners of the city are the Magen David and other synagogues and Jewish schools, remnants of another era.

The Jewish community there was never large. In the first half of the 20th century, there were about 3,500, and that number swelled to 5,000 during World War II, as Jews fled Europe. The population was small, but prosperous. They established newspapers, traded in indigo and silk, built schools and synagogues, and created a trust to ensure the longevity of those institutions.

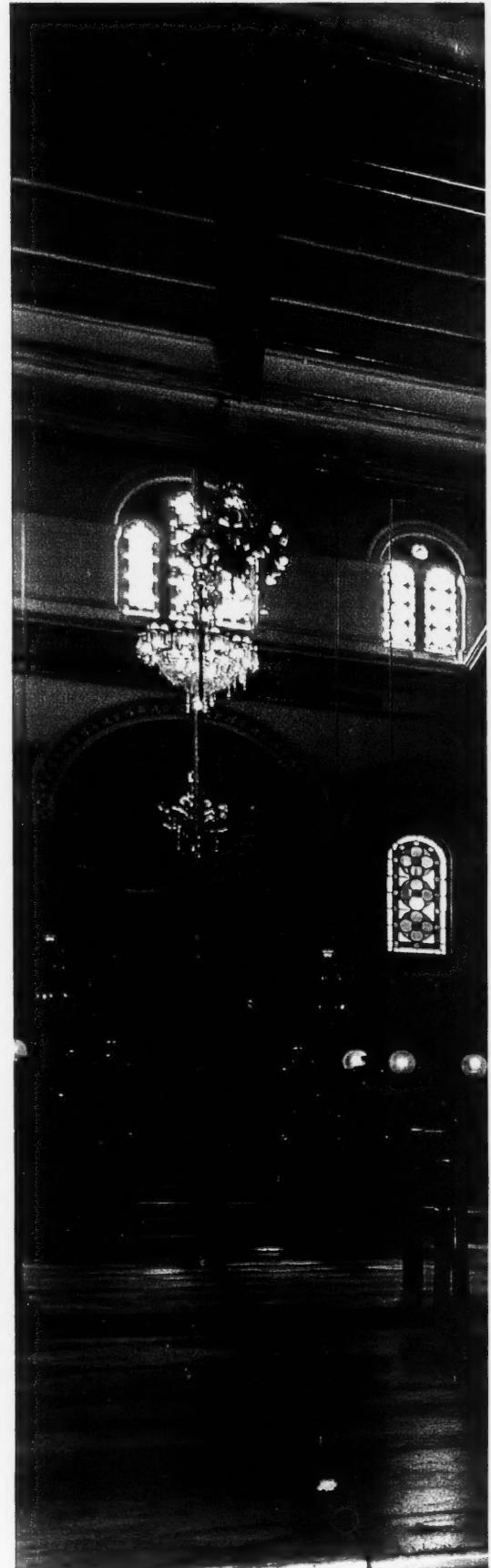
Today, just over 20 Jews remain, which is why many Kolkatans don't even know they're there. Ashok Sinha, a New York-based photographer who grew up in Kolkata, didn't know until August 2013, when he returned for a week-long visit. A friend familiar with Sinha's interest in issues of identity and multiculturalism suggested he try to find members of the disappearing community.

Sinha's interest was piqued, and he began looking for the city's Jews. At first, he could only find one: Shalome Israel, the groundskeeper for Kolkata's Jewish cemetery. Israel had been planning a move to—appropriately enough—the country of Israel, and would have already left had he not been delayed by a hospital stay. Sinha and Israel walked through the cemetery, Israel's dog Musafa bounding alongside, and got to know each other. Sinha asked if he could take Israel's picture, and he agreed.

Over the next year, Sinha maintained his connection with Israel, hoping he would stay in Kolkata until Sinha could return to take more photos. When Sinha finally returned in August 2014, Israel became Sinha's guide. He took him inside the synagogues, normally closed to non-Jews, and spoke to him about his sense of identity. How does it feel, Sinha wondered, to watch your community slowly disappear? When everyone is gone, what happens to your culture?

Israel's answer is that even when every Jew in Kolkata is gone, their mark on the city will endure. Even now, the city's two Jewish schools are full, although not with Jewish children. Funded by the trust, the subsidized schools are a boon to many poor Hindu and Muslim families who can't afford private schools but want their children to have a better education than they can get in the generally failing public schools.

Israel has made his planned move, but for him and other Jews of Kolkata, that education is key. The institutions they built will continue to serve the community, their legacy surviving in the hands of Hindu teachers and the padded footsteps of Muslim caretakers. **CJR**



CHRISTIE CHISHOLM is CJR's associate editor.



**Keeping watch** Muslim and Hindu caretakers oversee the Magen David Synagogue in Kolkata, India.

# 21st-century censorship

Governments around the world are using stealthy new strategies to control the media

BY PHILIP BENNETT AND MOISES NAIM

*Illustration by Red Nose Studio*

Two beliefs safely inhabit the canon of contemporary thinking about journalism. The first is that the internet is the most powerful force disrupting the news media. The second is that the internet and the communication and information tools it spawned, like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, are shifting power from governments to civil society and to individual bloggers, netizens, or “citizen journalists.” ¶ It is hard to disagree with these two beliefs. Yet they obscure evidence that governments are having as much success as the internet in disrupting independent media and determining the

information that reaches society. Moreover, in many poor countries or in those with autocratic regimes, government actions are more important than the internet in defining how information is produced and consumed, and by whom.

Illustrating this point is a curious fact: Censorship is flourishing in the information age. In theory, new technologies make it more difficult, and ultimately impossible, for governments to control the flow of information. Some have argued that the birth of the internet foreshadowed the death of censorship. In 1993, John Gilmore, an internet pioneer, told *Time*, “The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it.”

Today, many governments are routing around the liberating effects of the internet. Like entrepreneurs, they are relying on innovation and imitation. In countries such as Hungary, Ecuador, Turkey, and Kenya, officials are mimicking autocracies like Russia, Iran, or China by redacting critical news and building state media brands. They are also creating more subtle tools to complement the blunt instruments of attacking journalists.

As a result, the internet’s promise of open access to independent and diverse sources of information is a reality mostly for the minority of humanity living in mature democracies.

How is this happening? As journalists, we’ve seen firsthand the transformative effects of the internet. It seems capable of redrafting any equation of power in which information is a variable, starting in newsrooms. But this, it turns out, is not a universal law. When we started to map examples of censorship, we were alarmed to find so many brazen cases in plain sight. But even more surprising is how much censorship is hidden. Its scope seems hard to appreciate for several reasons. First, some tools for controlling the media are masquerading as market disruptions. Second, in many places internet usage and censorship are rapidly expanding at the same time. Third, while the internet is viewed as a global phenomenon, censorship can seem a parochial or national issue—in other words, isolated. Evidence suggests otherwise.



In Venezuela, a case that we examine below in depth, all three of these factors are in play. Internet usage there is among the fastest-growing in the world, even as the government pursues an ambitious program of censorship. Many methods used by the state are beneath the waterline, and have surfaced in other countries. They include, as we and others have discovered, gaining influence over independent media by using shell companies and phantom buyers. According to Tamoia Calzadilla, until last year the investigations editor at *Ultimas Noticias*, Venezuela's largest-circulation newspaper, the array of pressures on journalists in her country is not well understood in Europe or the United States. She resigned in protest after anonymous buyers took control of the paper, and a new editor demanded what she considered to be politically motivated changes in an investigative story about anti-government protests. "This is not your classic censorship, where they put a soldier in the door of the newspaper and assault the journalists," Calzadilla told us. "Instead, they buy the newspaper, they sue the reporters and drag them into court, they eavesdrop on your communications and then broadcast them on state television. This is censorship for the 21st century."

The new censorship has many practitioners, and increasingly refined practices:

- In **Hungary**, the government's Media Authority has the power to collect detailed information about journalists as well as advertising and editorial content. Prime Minister Viktor Orban's regime uses fines, taxes, and licensing to pressure critical media, and steers state advertising to friendly outlets. A comprehensive report by several global press freedom organizations concluded: "Hungary's independent media today faces creeping strangulation."
- In **Pakistan**, the state regulatory authority suspended the license of Geo TV, the most popular channel in the country, after a defamation claim against it was made by the intelligence services following a shooting of one of the station's best-known journalists. The channel was off the air for 15 days starting in June 2014. Pakistani journalists say that self-censorship and bribery are rife.
- In **Turkey**, a recent amendment to the internet law gave the Telecommunications Directorate the authority to close any website or content "to protect national security and public order, as well as to prevent a crime." President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been criticized for jailing dozens of journalists, and for using tax investigations and huge fines in retaliation for critical coverage (in 2009, for instance, tax authorities fined a leading media group \$2.5 billion). More recently, the government blocked Twitter and other social media allegedly in response to a corruption scandal that implicated Erdogan and other senior officials.

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## Governments went from spectators in the digital revolution to sophisticated early adopters of advanced technologies that allowed them to monitor journalists, and direct the flow of information.

- In **Russia**, President Vladimir Putin is remaking the media landscape in the government's image. In 2014, multiple media outlets were blocked, shuttered, or saw their editorial line change overnight in response to government pressure. While launching its own media operations, the government approved legislation limiting foreign investment in Russian media. The measure took aim at publications like *Vedomosti*, a daily newspaper respected for its standards and independence and owned by three foreign media groups: Dow Jones, the Financial Times Group and Finland's Sanoma.

TRADITIONAL CENSORSHIP WAS BASICALLY AN EXERCISE of cut and paste. Government agents inspected the content of newspapers, magazines, books, movies, or news broadcasts, often prior to release, and suppressed or altered them so that only information judged acceptable would reach the public. For dictatorships, censorship meant that an uncooperative media outlet could be shut down or that unruly editors and journalists exiled, jailed, or murdered.

Starting in the early 1990s, when journalism went online, censorship followed. Filtering, blocking and hacking replaced scissors and black ink. Some governments barred access to Web pages they didn't like, redirected users to sites that looked independent but which in fact they controlled, and influenced the conversation in chat rooms and discussion groups via the participation of trained functionaries. They directed anonymous hackers to vandalize the sites and blogs, and disrupt the internet presence of critics, defacing, or freezing their Facebook pages or Twitter accounts.

Tech-savvy activists quickly found ways to protect themselves and evade digital censorship. For a while it looked like agile, hyperconnected, and decentralized networks of activists, journalists, and critics had the upper hand in a battle against centralized, hierachal, and unwieldy government bureaucracies. But governments caught up. Many went from spectators in the digital revolution to sophisticated early adopters of advanced technologies that allowed them to monitor content, activists, and journalists, and direct the flow of information.

No place shows the contradictions of this contest on as grand a scale as China. The country with the most internet users and the fastest-growing connected population is also the world's most ambitious censor. Of the three billion internet users in the world, 22 percent live in China (nearly 10 percent live in the US). The government maintains the

## The 21st Century Censorship Matrix

*Government tools to control or influence the production and dissemination of information and opinion*

VISIBLE	DIRECT	INDIRECT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct violence/intimidation/arrest/harassment of journalists</li> <li>• Curtailing/controlling/limiting access to government information and public officials</li> <li>• Gag laws/anti-defamation legislation/criminalization of criticism of top government officials and the military</li> <li>• Government licensing of media companies and journalists</li> <li>• Lawsuits or threat of lawsuits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling access to inputs: newsprint, imported equipment and spare parts</li> <li>• Discriminatory access to government subsidies, preferential exchange rates, and credit</li> <li>• Financial pressures: taxes, fines, audits</li> <li>• Restriction on foreign news operations: either newsgathering or investments/ownership of local media companies by foreign investors</li> <li>• Inducing “voluntary” pledges by journalists not to cover stories (self-censorship)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bribing editors, journalists, media companies</li> <li>• Blocking or filtering content</li> <li>• Electronic surveillance of journalists by the state</li> <li>• Covert pressure for dismissal of individual editors, journalists, columnists, cartoonists, TV hosts, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal of state advertising and pressure on private advertisers to withhold or limit ads in “unfriendly” media</li> <li>• Stealth purchases of independent media companies by government proxies</li> <li>• State-sponsored hacking into online news media to disrupt or shut down independent sites</li> <li>• Creating stealth/fake news sources</li> <li>• Web activism by government-controlled sites, bloggers, netizens, chat-room participants, article commentators, etc.</li> </ul>

Source: Naim and Bennett (2014)

“Great Firewall” to block unacceptable content, including foreign news sites. An estimated two million censors police the internet and the activities of users. Yet the BBC reports that a 2014 poll found that 76 percent of Chinese questioned said they felt free from government surveillance. This was the highest rate of the 17 countries polled.

The internet has allowed Chinese authorities to deploy censorship strategies that are subtle and harder for the public to see. In Hong Kong, where China is obligated by treaty to respect a free press, Beijing has used an array of measures to limit independent journalism, including selective violence against editors and the arrest of reporters. But it has also arranged the firing of critical reporters and columnists and the withdrawal of advertising by state and private sources, including multinationals, and launched cyberattacks on websites. The Hong Kong Journalists Association described 2014 as “the darkest for press freedom in several decades.”

China’s actions demonstrate the emerging censorship menu: It can be direct and visible, or indirect and stealthy. These stealth strategies have become important as more governments try to hide their efforts to control the media. Stealth censorship can involve creating entities that look like private companies, or government-organized, non-governmental organizations, known as GONGOS. These organizations purport to represent civil society, but in practice are government agencies. The approach allows the anonymous

hackers in Russia or China who attack the networks of critics at home, or governments abroad, to be portrayed as mysterious members of the sprawling global civil society, rather than allies of the regime.

Stealth censorship appeals to authoritarian governments that want to appear like democracies—or at least not like old-style dictatorships. And they have more options available to them than ever.

**IN ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES, HOW A GOVERNMENT CENSORS** often reflects the tension between projecting an image of democracy and ruthlessly suppressing dissent. Some governments are trying to reconcile this contradiction by outsourcing censorship to groups they secretly control. Or they use currency controls to starve publishers of newsprint. Or they promote the migration of irritating journalists from major papers to online startups, where they have to build new audiences. This allows the government to keep a grip on the news media while concealing its fingerprints.

That is the story today in Venezuela. The country of 30 million has become a laboratory for testing ways to control the flow of news and information. As a case study in how governments disrupt independent media, the Venezuelan model offers several compelling ingredients: a feisty and courageous independent media, a press establishment serving elite audiences, a socialist revolution that claims to be

building a popular democracy, and a deeply polarized citizenry that is witness to a near constant information war.

Recently, as a political and economic crisis has deepened, the state and its allies appear to have unveiled a new weapon: quieting critical reporting through the shadowy purchase of some of the private media companies most vexing to the government.

At first, the deals looked similar to the changing of the guard that is happening at old-line media institutions around the world. They have involved Venezuela's best-selling but financially troubled newspaper, *Ultimas Noticias*, and its oldest daily, *El Universal*. But with time the sales seem less the result of market disruption, and more like political meddling using government-friendly buyers, dark money, and a web of foreign companies, some of them created overnight in order to conceal the identities of the new owners.

The legal strategies used in the acquisitions make them hard to trace and evaluate. No evidence of a direct connection to government funds has surfaced. But the highly irregular structure of the deals, followed by changes in the editorial lines of the publications, have convinced journalists that their papers have lost their independence.

In the case of *Ultimas Noticias* and its parent chain, for instance, the buyer was Latam Media Holding, a shell company created in Curaçao less than a month before the sale, according to documents that we've examined. The price, which was not made public at the time, was at least \$97 million, a huge sum for newspapers in Venezuela's anemic economy. According to the documents, two days before the sale, one original shareholder sold her stock for \$11 million to a Latin American currency fund of opaque ownership, a transaction not disclosed publicly. The biggest paper in the country had changed hands, and questions about the origin of the funds and the identities of the owners were met with silence.

The intrigue thickened when it was revealed that Latam Media Holding is controlled by Robert Hanson, a British businessman with no evident experience investing in media or in Latin America. Hanson is the multimillionaire son of the late British industrialist Lord Hanson, and a familiar figure in London society columns (the "raffish blade about town" in one memorable description in *The Times* of London). He has declined to talk about the purchase.

The new editors of *Ultimas Noticias* reassured the staff that the paper's standards would not change. But within weeks, reporters say, they were told to soften pieces critical of the government or pressured not to write them at all, a

charge the current editor has denied. Since the purchase, more than 50 journalists have resigned.

Journalists and media executives in Venezuela are used to rough treatment from authorities. The late President Hugo Chávez and his handpicked successor, the current President Nicolás Maduro, have attacked private news media for supporting the opposition and accused them of destabilizing the country. The government has passed legislation limiting press freedom, restricted access to public information, levied fines and taxes on media companies, withheld broadcast licenses, forced programs off the air, and used foreign currency controls to create a scarcity of newsprint, which is imported. At least a dozen newspapers have closed for lack of printing supplies.

The state has a long record of harassing, detaining, and beating reporters, and suing them for defamation. Officials routinely take to state media to excoriate individual reporters or news outlets. Reporters know they run high personal risks for writing about corruption or covering shortages of basic necessities, from toilet paper to medicine or food staples, in ways that reflect badly on the government. In a survey of journalists by the Venezuelan branch of the Institute for Press and Society, which supports press freedom, 42 percent reported being pressured by officials to change a story.

Cracking down directly on the media has proven costly to the government, sparking domestic protests and bringing international condemnation. And it has never worked for long. Until recently, Venezuelans could find vigorous coverage of such sensitive topics as Chávez's health (he died of cancer in 2013), shocking crime statistics (the second-highest murder rate in the world), and state management of the energy sector (including the world's largest oil reserves).

Then came the violent clashes between protesters and police during the first half of 2014. Students started the protests in response to a crime on a provincial campus, but they quickly grew into a full-blown crisis for Maduro. As the protests spread, and with them pictures of the dead and wounded, the government banned NTN24, an international cable channel covering the violence. It blocked all images on Twitter. Reporters, photographers, and camera operators were detained and beaten. State media scarcely covered the violence or the motives behind the protests. Particularly startling to some viewers was the lack of tough coverage on *Globovision*, a 24-hour news channel. It had been the last television station that was critical of the government. But several months earlier, it had been bought by an insurance firm reportedly close to the Maduro regime.

At *Ultimas Noticias*, the investigative team run by Tamoa Calzadilla obtained an electrifying scoop: a video showing police and men in civilian clothes firing on fleeing protesters, killing one. Despite the recent sale of the paper, Calzadilla and her team put the video online. Their report led to the first arrests of members of the security forces. But a short time later, the

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The biggest newspaper in Venezuela had changed hands, and questions about the origin of the funds and the identities of the new owners were met with silence.

president of the chain that owns the newspaper resigned and was replaced by an ally of the ruling party.

The following month, Calzadilla presented the new editor with an inside look at the protesters and the police squaring off in Caracas. She says that he refused to run the piece unless it was changed to say that protesters were financed by the United States (there is no evidence of this). Instead, Calzadilla resigned, going into a bathroom in the newsroom and tweeting, “journalism first,” before exiting the building.

A month after the protests subsided last June, the owners of *El Universal* (whom Maduro had described on television as “rancid oligarchy”) announced that they had sold the 106-year-old daily.

If the purchase of *Ultimas Noticias* was mysterious, the sale of *El Universal* in July 2014 contained elements of farce. It was bought by a Spanish investment firm that had been founded a year earlier with an initial capital of about \$4,000. According to documents published by the blogger Alek Boyd, the sole shareholder in the Spanish firm was a Panama-registered corporation called Tecnobreaks, Inc. But when Boyd contacted the founders of Tecnobreaks, a Venezuelan father and son apparently in the auto repair business, they said they had no idea of the sale and were not people of means. It was as if The New York Times had been bought by a Midas franchisee.

Months later, it is still a mystery who is behind the purchase of *El Universal* or how much they paid (estimates range from \$20 million to \$100 million). The Spanish firm remains the purchaser of record. But the impact on the journalism has been clear. In the month after the sale, at least 26 journalists said they were dismissed over critical coverage. Rayma Suprani, a popular editorial cartoonist, was fired for a cartoon that mocked Chávez’s famous signature, trailing off in a flat line, to depict the demise of healthcare in Venezuela. “We don’t know who bought *El Universal* or who pays the salaries,” she told CNN en Español after her dismissal. “But now we know they are bothered by the critical editorial line. So we can presume that it wasn’t some invisible man but the government got its hands on it.”

Suprani now posts her cartoons on Twitter, where she has more than half a million followers. Many of Venezuela’s most enterprising journalists have migrated online. Tamoa Calzadilla is now investigations editor of runrun.es, an independent news site with reporters in Caracas, where, she told us, “we are doing the journalism that needs to be done.” But while internet usage is growing sharply in Venezuela, less than half the population has access to the Web. In a country divided down the middle by politics, most Venezuelans are now getting half the story.

Despite the economic crisis, the government is investing aggressively to build its own media empire. State-owned Telesur has become the largest 24-hour television news channel in Latin America. Started by Chávez “to lead and promote the unification of the peoples of the SOUTH,” it now

employs 800 reporters. The company reached a milestone last year with the launch of an English-language website and newscast, which it promoted in a full-page ad in *The New Yorker*.

FOR A MOMENT IN 2011, DURING THE ARAB SPRING, SOCIAL media seemed to give democracy activists an advantage against entrenched regimes. As protesters triumphed in Egypt, Google executive and activist Wael Ghonim famously told Wolf Blitzer, “If you want to liberate a government, give them the internet.” Although the complex dynamics of the uprising went far beyond a “Facebook Revolution,” the term captured a sense that something important had changed.

Four years later, media freedom in Egypt is under withering assault. Dozens of journalists have been jailed, according

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## National security policies place the US and other mature democracies in the same discussion as countries, like Russia, that see the internet as both a threat and a means of control.

to the Committee to Protect Journalists. And last summer, Amnesty International reported having obtained internal documents that describe a government contract to build a system to spy on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other social media.

This might be a slogan for the Facebook counter-revolution: To empower a government, give it the internet.

The Edward Snowden leaks made clear that the internet is a tool for peering into the lives of citizens, including journalists, for every government with the means to do so. Whether domestic spying in the United States or Great Britain qualifies as censorship is a matter of debate. But the Obama administration’s authorization of secret wiretaps of journalists and aggressive leak prosecutions has had a well-documented chilling effect on national-security reporting. At the very least, electronic snooping by the government means that no journalist reporting on secrets can promise in good conscience to guarantee a source anonymity.

National security policies place the US and other mature democracies in the same discussion with countries, like Russia, that see the internet as both a threat and a means of control. Most of these countries have not tried to hide from charges that they perform surveillance over the internet. Instead, Russia, India, Australia, and others have approved security legislation that writes the practice into law.

Journalists legitimately fear being swept up in this electronic dragnet. But frequently they are its specific targets. China has hacked foreign journalists’ email accounts, presumably to vacuum up their sources, and broke into the servers of leading US newspapers. The NSA hacked into Al

Jazeera. The Colombian government spied on communications of foreign journalists covering peace talks with rebels. Ethiopia's Information Network Security Agency has tracked journalists in the United States. Belarus, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan all routinely monitor reporters' communications, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, describes the sinister consequences of surveillance in his recent book, *The New Censorship*. Simon recounts in chilling detail how Iran turned journalists' reliance on the internet into a weapon against protesters in 2009. Security agents tortured journalists like Maziar Bahari (the subject of the Jon Stewart film *Rosewater*) until they divulged their social media and email passwords, and then combed through their networks, identifying and arresting sources. Iranian officials also created fake Facebook accounts to lure activists. "The use of Facebook and other social media platforms by governments to dismantle political networks has become a standard practice," Simon writes.

It's not only states that are using these techniques. In Mexico, drug cartels run grotesque online media operations to intimidate rivals, the government, and the public. They have viciously silenced efforts to report anonymously on their activities on social media. In October 2014, cartel members kidnapped a citizen journalist in Reynosa, Maria del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, and then posted pictures of her dead body on her Twitter account.

It is little wonder why governments would pursue a strategy of weakening print and broadcast companies if it meant journalists moved to a platform the state can control and monitor. In Russia and elsewhere, there is a pattern of independent media being pressured not just by markets but by the state to move online, where they must rebuild their audi-

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**It is naïve to assume there is a technological fix for governments that are determined to concentrate power and do whatever it takes to keep it.**

ence and the state is a powerful tenant, if not the landlord. If independent media grow too big online, like the popular Russian news site Lenta.ru, they can see their editors suddenly dismissed, the editorial line changed, and the site crumble.

One disturbing trend is the banding together of governments to create an internet that is easier to police. China has advised Iran on how to build a self-contained "Halal" internet. Beijing has also been sharing know-how with Zambia to block critical Web content, according to Reporters Without Borders. Private surveillance firms advertise their wares to countries that want to upgrade their encryption penetrating software.

If that is not enough, some governments can still count on self-censorship to do the work for them. Last October, after

a deadly attack on the army by Islamic militants, top editors at more than a dozen Egyptian newspapers pledged to withhold criticism of the government and block "attempts to doubt state institutions or insult the army or police or judiciary." The ownership of Al Nahar television added: "Freedom of expression cannot ever justify belittling the Egyptian Army's morale."

FOR EVERY GOVERNMENT THAT SUCCEEDS IN CONTROLLING the free flow of information or repressing journalists, there is a counterexample. Courageous citizens have found ways to circumvent or undermine official controls. Or they are willing simply to risk opposing a government's claims that it has the sole authority to write history. This power struggle is far from over, and its outcome will vary among countries and over time. Technological innovation will create new options that enable individuals and organizations to counteract government censorship, even as governments adopt technologies that enhance their ability to censor.

Pressures on governments for transparency, accountability, access to public information, and more citizen participation in public decisions will not go away. Autocratic states face populations that are more politically awake, restless, and harder to silence. Ukrainians showed recently that citizens fed up with the way they are governed could topple a president, even if he has the support of neighboring Russia. Or in Hong Kong, as the world witnessed last fall, a leaderless group of activists can defy China's immense power.

But states retain extraordinary capacities to alter the flow of information to suit their interests. And a growing number of governments are undermining the checks and balances that constrain chief executives. From Russia to

Turkey, Hungary to Bolivia, leaders are packing Supreme Courts and the judiciary with loyalists and staging elections that reward their allies. They are weakening the institutions that exist to prevent the concentration of power. In such a political environment, independent media cannot survive for long.

The internet can redistribute power. But it is naïve to assume that there is a simple technological fix for governments and their leaders who are determined to concentrate power and do whatever it takes to keep it. Censorship will rise and fall as technological innovation and the hunger for freedom clash with governments bent on controlling their citizens, starting with what they read, watch, and hear. **CJR**

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# The reckoning

James Foley's murder thrust GlobalPost into the middle of an industry-wide debate about the ethics of working with the inexperienced, poorly paid freelancers who increasingly cover the world's wars

BY ALEXIS SOBEL FITTS

Last October, Charles M. Sennott, a co-founder of GlobalPost, stood on stage at International House New York and laid out his vision for coverage of the world's danger zones. Two months had passed since a grisly video confirmed the execution of James Foley by Islamic militants, and almost two years since Foley had been kidnapped, while freelancing for GlobalPost from Syria. ¶ In that time, Sennott and GlobalPost had been thrust into the middle of a debate about an uncomfortable truth that the US media had been ignoring, or rationalizing, for years: As embattled

newsrooms retreated from foreign coverage, the job of reporting from dangerous places has increasingly fallen to eager young freelancers who are paid little and supported—in terms of mentoring, editorial guidance, supplies, etc.—even less. Foley's death, and the subsequent killings of journalists Steven Sotloff and Luke Somers, have forced a reckoning in the relationship between news organizations and the freelance journalists who venture into increasingly dangerous situations at their behest.

When GlobalPost launched in 2008 (its site wasn't live until January 2009) as a commercial news outlet that would cover the world, it was lauded as an answer—if not *the* answer—to the decline in foreign coverage. But Sennott had gradually come to believe that, with a handful of exceptions (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc.), journalism's stricken for-profit model was unable to pay for the kind of expensive, in-depth coverage that he wanted to produce.

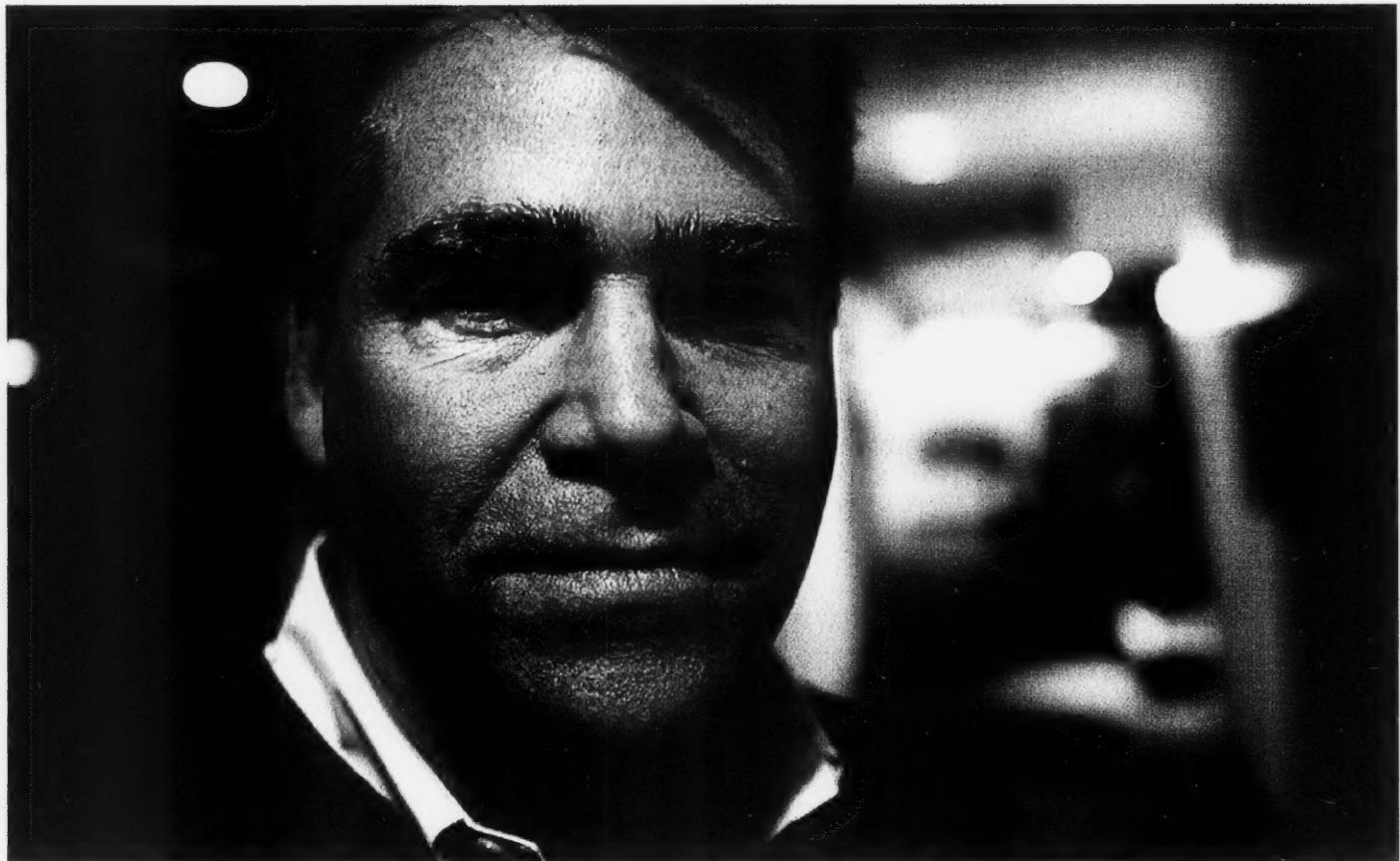
By 2012, GlobalPost had won a slew of prestigious awards, including a Peabody, but was still not profitable. Sennott had already begun to seek foundation grants to fund the big projects that didn't fit into the outlet's editorial budget. Soon, he doubled down on these fundraising efforts, with the goal of creating a nonprofit, called GroundTruth, that would do nothing but big, ambitious stories and provide mentoring and training for what Sennott calls “the next generation” of foreign correspondents. Nonprofit funding had already allowed Sennott to host fellowships for young journalists that

tried to approximate the close-knit experience of working in a foreign bureau—including a pop-up newsroom in Cairo in 2011, dedicated to covering the Arab Spring—and he was convinced that this was the solution he had been looking for.

This diversion has strained the relationship between Sennott and Philip Balboni, GlobalPost's CEO and co-founder who, though he encouraged Sennott's quest for nonprofit funding, still believes in the for-profit approach. For now, a three-year publishing agreement allows GroundTruth's journalism to appear under a small “Special Reports” tab on GlobalPost's website, but that is virtually all that connects the two organizations.

Last spring, having secured \$3 million in seed money, Sennott moved his small GroundTruth staff to a handful of cubicles five miles across Boston from the GlobalPost headquarters. In mid-August, the group received its 501c3 status. Five days later, the video of Foley's beheading was released. Sennott watched it from his new newsroom, where the physical separation was mirrored by a palpable philosophical distance from GlobalPost and Balboni.

“It's a powerful moment in our industry, a powerful moment where young people want to do this work but it's coming with rising peril,” Sennott told the audience at International House, who were there to celebrate a reporting project GroundTruth had sponsored on youth unemployment around the world. “We need to provide them with resources and we need to provide them with training and



**Coming of age** Sennott says grant-funded projects are the best way to support in-depth reporting around the world.

mentoring. That is our mission at GroundTruth and we've never felt more compelled to do it." The crowd cheered.

"Jim Foley was my friend and my colleague, and we're more committed than ever right now to taking our mission to a new level," Sennott told me, lingering onstage while the rest of the conference-goers filed to cocktail hour. "We do this with incredible sadness, but also the sense of a moment .... Foley and Sotloff have changed the game. Their murders have provided us with a necessary coming of age."

WHEN SENNOTT BEGAN HIS NEWSPAPER CAREER IN 1986 AS a reporter at *The Record*, in Hackensack, NJ, "the resources were endless." He had a singular, attainable goal: get to *The Boston Globe*, his hometown paper, which had a thriving foreign desk, and then go abroad. By the time the September 11 attacks shifted American attention to the Middle East, Sennott had just finished a stint as the *Globe's* bureau chief in the region, and he was quickly dispatched to Afghanistan. In Kabul, the *Globe* staffed a house with photographers, fixers, and reporters. "You had the attention of your editors, you had the resources of a newspaper that was healthy, and it made a commitment to tell the story of our time," says Sennott. "That age is over."

Interest in Afghanistan was already waning when Sennott returned to Boston in 2005 to take a Nieman fellowship at

Harvard. Declines in advertising and circulation were forcing the newspaper industry to shrink, both in size and in ambition. The *Globe* was reducing foreign coverage, while papers like *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Newsday*, and *The Baltimore Sun* had abandoned international bureaus entirely. At Harvard, Sennott worried about the future of his friends and colleagues, decorated war reporters who were watching their jobs evaporate. He began imagining a digital-only enterprise that could replace some of the jobs the internet had destroyed.

By organizing reporters into a nonprofit, Sennott reasoned, he could create a business selling their work back to newspapers. As it happened, there was someone else in Boston who at that very moment was making the rounds with essentially the same idea.

Philip Balboni was the perfect partner for Sennott. As the former president of New England Cable News, he had the business background Sennott lacked, and had already weathered the upheaval that the arrival of cable wrought on television news. Where Sennott's concept focused on the disappearance of journalism jobs, Balboni's idea was about underserved readers—and it was for-profit. "Despite the convention that people aren't interested in international news," says Balboni, "I always believed that there was a substantial audience for it." Balboni won Sennott over. He left the *Globe*, set aside his nonprofit idea in favor of advertising plans that seemed promising, and the

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**'At really prestigious publications they'd be like: *Okay, yes, stop talking. We can't hear this, we don't want to be liable*', says Lauren Bohn of her efforts to pitch stories from war zones as a freelancer.**

two began to build GlobalPost. "We, the Founders of GlobalPost, are also acutely aware of the fact that quality journalism in America is threatened more profoundly today than at any time in our history," read the site's mission statement. "GlobalPost is a direct response to these forces."

Those forces are still at work. A 2010 survey by the *American Journalism Review* found that the number of foreign correspondents at US newspapers had dropped from 307 in 2003 to 234—a number that would have been much higher had it included the hundreds of freelancers who have ventured abroad to take advantage of the unfilled demand for news from elsewhere. And GlobalPost was hardly alone in capitalizing on the emerging freelance economy when it staffed its nascent news organization with 65 freelance correspondents, some with a contract to produce four stories a month for a \$1,000 flat fee.

**IN THE INTERNET AGE, \$250 IS A COMMON STORY RATE. BUT** such a rate, which makes it difficult for *any* freelancer to earn a living, is obviously not enough to outfit a journalist for war. "You couldn't really pay the bills just writing for GlobalPost," says Patrick Winn, who began his foreign career in 2008 writing for GlobalPost in Bangkok, and now works full-time for the outlet. In the beginning, Sennott's personal connections attracted seasoned war correspondents, like Jane Arraf, who were paid higher rates, and less-experienced reporters were eager to be a part of the new project.

"When I met Charlie, he kind of made it out like there'd be senior people and they'd be looking out for you," recalls Tom A. Peter, who signed on to cover Iraq as one of GlobalPost's first correspondents. Those mentors never materialized, he says; the structure and camaraderie of the bureau system didn't translate to freelance life, where even established journalists scramble for assignments. Meanwhile, Peter says his editors at GlobalPost would encourage him to travel to report stories, but couldn't always pay his expenses—a sketchy proposition when traveling cheaply means skimping on the fixers, drivers, and lodging that provide at least a modicum of protection in a conflict zone. After two years, Peter ended his contract with GlobalPost.

Even in its earliest days, however, GlobalPost was doing better than a lot of outlets just by paying *something*—and at least acknowledging the need to support its young journalists in the field. Lauren Bohn, who was recently hired to cover the

Middle East for GroundTruth full-time, had previously supported her freelance life with fellowships—a Fulbright, grants from the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, and so on. Like Peter, Bohn also had to skimp on lodging and drivers for her and her translator when covering Syria right out of college. "I was 23," she says, "and I was weighing, 'Do I put this guy's life at risk and this guy's life at risk because I want to tell this story?'" She left Syria after only a few weeks. But Bohn continued to freelance, effectively learning by doing, covering Tunisian revolutionaries and Kurdish soldiers fighting ISIS. Editors, for the most part, didn't have time to discuss her stories in advance or keep track of her movements while covering the Arab Spring—developing a relationship that might be interpreted as an obligation should things go wrong. "At really prestigious publications they'd be like: 'Okay, yes, stop talking. We can't hear this, we don't want to be liable,'" Bohn says.

James Foley built his career within this climate. His first stories were from Afghanistan, and then trailing rebel armies during the Libyan civil war. Though Foley hadn't gotten into journalism until his mid-30s, he worked with the gusto of youth—spending long stretches of time in war zones, filing stories close to the front lines. He quickly made his name in video, stringing together harrowing footage that he often posted unedited. Foley didn't seem to be chasing intimacy with his subjects so much as a stunning proximity to war. He filmed incoming missiles and machine-gun fire, cast off casually by teenage fighters standing just a few feet away. In one video, he leaves his camera running as he flees, alongside Libyan rebels, from government forces. The footage bounces through the dust and grass as Foley sprints, capturing the splitting sounds of heavy fire, dangerously close.

Foley had already paid a heavy price for such risks. In 2011, during a battle in Libya, he'd been shot at, and his friend and colleague was mortally wounded at his side. Foley leapt up amid the gunfire to surrender to the Libyan army, which held him captive for 44 days. This was the beginning of GlobalPost's long and painful odyssey with Foley. Shortly after his release, he was back at the front, where he covered the fall of Tripoli and the capture and killing of Muammar Qaddafi. His coverage helped GlobalPost win an Overseas Press Club award in 2012. When he arrived in Syria, Foley's professional identity was deeply tied to GlobalPost.

Tracey Shelton is one of GlobalPost's most decorated reporters, having won a George Polk Award, an Overseas

Press Club Award, and a Peabody during her tenure. But in 2011, Shelton was covering the Libyan civil war as a stringer for *The National*, an English-language newspaper based in Abu Dhabi, where she says she had little contact with her editors. "With *The National* it was very much a business transaction, as long as I kept filing stories," she says. That was fine with Shelton, until she arrived in Benghazi late, checked into a hotel, and awoke in the middle of the night to a group of men breaking into her room. They intended to kidnap her. Tied up in her sheets, without any contacts in her new city, Shelton tried to think of the last time she'd emailed anyone with her plans. She couldn't remember.

The knowledge that no one was coming for her gave Shelton extra incentive to slip her restraints and escape. Badly beaten and having lost all her money and equipment, she emailed her editors at *The National* to ask for a few extra days on her stories. They were sympathetic, but had no obligation to her and she lost the string.

Shelton was saved when an editor at GlobalPost offered to take her stories from Libya. By the time Shelton joined GlobalPost, three years after its launch, the outlet was more organized and more connected to its reporters in the field than it had been early on. "It was different with GlobalPost, because they were always keeping track of where I was," she recalls. Even as a freelancer, her editors approved all her travel in Libya, and upon her return the organization paid for a conflict-safety course. Sennott personally chipped in to buy Shelton a flak jacket before she went to Syria.

Since those early startup days, GlobalPost has made moves to better support its reporters, paying higher rates in conflict zones—often double the rates for regular stories, according to Balboni. And in 2010, the outlet began converting some of its freelancers to full-time salaries, rather than per-story rates. Balboni wouldn't disclose specifics, but one freelancer confirmed receiving a standard rate of \$500, without expenses, for news stories from Afghanistan in 2010 and 2011. "If we cannot afford the resources needed to manage the risk of a proposed trip, then we do not commission it," Balboni wrote in an email. "Approved expenses may include fixers, translators and the safest means of transport as determined with the reporter."

Still, GlobalPost has yet to find a business model that can fully alleviate the precarious, isolated existence of the modern

freelancer abroad—though not for lack of trying. Since its launch, the outlet has cycled through a number of models: It was an early adopter of native advertising, but that never took off; interest in a membership program, "Passport Service," was lackluster—it drew fewer than 500 subscribers, leading Balboni to drop subscription rates from \$199 to \$29.95 and tack on chats with correspondents, travel videos, and tourism tips as extras. Advertising still provides the bulk of the site's revenue, as well as syndication agreements with 23 news organizations, including NBC and NPR. He won't share current figures, but, Balboni says, "In terms of profitability, that's still in the future."

Both Sennott and Balboni acknowledge that GlobalPost's rates, even now, can't provide the same resources that the major newspapers had in their heyday. "We surely cannot afford to pay the highest rates in journalism," Balboni wrote in an email. "But no one has ever questioned the caliber of our work or the passionate commitment we bring to it."

Sennott, though, saw what he considers a solution in 2011, when he used a grant to pay for an investigative series on Kosovo's mafia by an old friend, Matt McAllister. "Here's a Pulitzer-Prize winner that I can suddenly pay a fair rate—for a driver, a translator," he says. The two worked out a rate of more than a dollar a word, "not that great," says Sennott, but better than GlobalPost could afford to pay for projects at the time.

Balboni encouraged Sennott's interest in looking into foundation grants, and by the spring of 2011, it had become his full-time job—and all he could talk about. At a meeting that April at USC's Annenberg School of Journalism, a student named Kevin Douglas Grant offered to show Sennott around. During the tour, Sennott told him about his project. "I know we just met, but let me tell you what's going on," Grant recalls Sennott saying. "It was exciting to have this old-school newspaper guy just leveling with me." By the end of the tour, Sennott had asked Grant to apply for a job with him. A month after graduation, he drove cross-country with his girlfriend to help launch GlobalPost's Special Reports division, which would later evolve into GroundTruth.

BEING A WAR CORRESPONDENT HAS NEVER COME WITH guarantees of safety, but in the past the title alone provided a certain kind of protection. Reporters could move like medics through conflict zones; a "press" sign emblazoned

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**GlobalPost co-founder Philip Balboni says he now believes it may be impossible to fully protect journalists in a world that has become far more dangerous.**

across a flak jacket would deter targeted fire. Even militant Islamic groups considered reporters as an odious necessity. The Taliban and Hezbollah may not have liked Western journalists, but still they gave them interviews and hosted press conferences. Journalists wanted a story, Islamic extremists wanted to be understood—and the only way to spread their message was to deal with the reporters. The value of this exchange extends to rebel groups: It's why members of the Syrian Free Army went to such lengths to court and protect the journalists who came to cover the earliest days of the civil war—why they searched for Foley in the weeks after his kidnapping. Keeping journalists safe was vital to ensuring they continued to come.

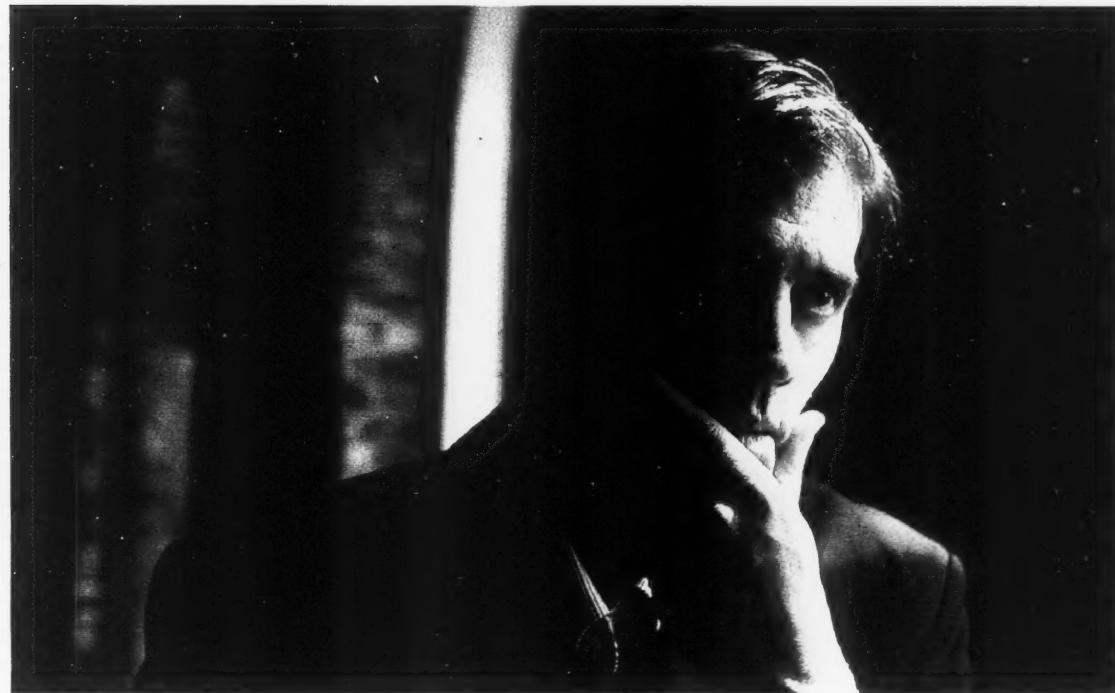
As digital media have matured and become more widely accessible, however, there's increasingly no need for journalists to serve as intermediaries, and that shift has put lives at risk. Last year, Al Qaeda launched a Twitter account. In response to the "Bring Back Our Girls" movement, the Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram posted YouTube videos—the same way that ISIS broadcast the executions of Foley and Sotloff. In 2013, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that, during the war in Iraq, nearly two out of every three journalists who died were victims of targeted killings. At least 70 journalists have been killed since the start of the Syrian civil war, and that number doesn't include the dozens thought to be held by kidnappers. "In some parts of the world journalists have become targets just because they're journalists," says Robert Mahoney, CPJ's deputy director. "Threats to safety no longer stem only from being caught in the crossfire, it's also deliberate targeting for ransom and political gain."

Kidnapping has become a major revenue stream for extremists. A *New York Times* investigation found that Al

Qaeda and its affiliates have captured at least \$125 million in ransom payments since 2008. And captive journalists make good propaganda tools. In November, ISIS released the seventh installment of "Lend Me Your Ears," a series of "news" broadcasts featuring British journalist John Cantlie, who was kidnapped along with Foley.

Places like Syria, where the risks are considered unacceptably high, are becoming all but off limits to Western journalists, except for the occasional quick in-and-out trip. Last year, the death toll of journalists dropped in the country, not because it's less dangerous but because fewer foreigners (and Syrians) were still reporting there. Editors who accept work from freelancers in conflict zones have to weigh how much responsibility they are willing to take on. After the death of freelance journalist Marie Colvin in Syria in 2012, while on assignment for *The Sunday Times* of London, the paper announced that it would no longer accept work from Syria. Since longtime correspondent Jill Carroll's kidnapping in Iraq, *The Christian Science Monitor* won't work with reporters in conflict zones without a contract, insurance, and a prior relationship. "We don't know how they think, how they work," says Amelia Newcomb, the paper's international editor. "Those intangibles that make a difference."

When James Foley went into Syria, he wasn't dispatched by GlobalPost but was instead operating as an independent freelancer. "Because of our prior relationship with Jim, we did take some stories from him in Syria," says Balboni. "But Jim made his own decisions and his own travel plans and was a fully independent correspondent." Just a few weeks before he was kidnapped, Foley acknowledged that the economics of freelancing caused him to take more gambles. "It's the freelancer's conundrum, taking bigger risks to beat



STEVEN SENNE / AP PHOTO

**In harm's way**  
James Foley  
came to  
symbolize  
the plight of  
freelancers  
who are often  
forced to take  
unacceptable  
risks to cover  
conflict.

staffers," he told a *Newsweek* reporter. "I think it's just basic laws of competition; you need to have something the staffers don't, but in a conflict zone that means you take bigger risks: go in sooner, stay longer, go closer."

To minimize risk during trips to Syria after the kidnap threat emerged, Liz Sly, *The Washington Post's* Beirut bureau chief, would limit her time in the country to two or three days—go in, get the story, get out. But traveling for a isolated story takes a budget that a single freelance story almost certainly won't command. The first time Sly met Foley, at the LiWan Hotel in Antakya, he was just coming off a 44-day stretch of reporting from Aleppo. "That's a long time," she told me. "People will notice you. They've got time to put a plan together, time to trail you, time to see if you have a pattern they can disrupt." Austin Tice, a Georgetown Law student, planned to stay in Syria even longer—the full three months of his summer break. Tice soon began selling stories to *The Washington Post* and spoke with Sly on Skype, seeking advice on working in war zones. She told him that staying for long periods was not a good idea. In August 2012, Tice stopped communicating with friends. Aside from a single video showing Tice blindfolded, kneeling on a hilltop in the desert, no one has heard from him since.

Douglas Jehl, *The Washington Post's* foreign editor, says the kidnappings have made him "more careful" about accepting work from reporters in conflict zones who he doesn't have a relationship with. "If someone is working for us we have an obligation to keep them safe, and that involves a big institutional commitment." I asked Jehl if today he would publish Tice, or another young journalist with limited experience pitching stories from a war zone. "No," he answered. "Not under the circumstances in which he went in."

AFTER FOLEY WAS CAPTURED ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND released by the Libyan government, his parents were understanding of their son's decision to remain in conflict reporting. But after his death, their comments betrayed regret. "I think that we take journalists for granted sometimes," Foley's father, John, told the members of the press who gathered on his front lawn. "They—particularly freelance people—they risk their lives. They have no resources, no protections, not a major network."

In 2013, GlobalPost began to scale back its reliance on freelancers, and focused instead on the 13 full-time "senior correspondents" who are exclusive to the organization and given a competitive salary, if not benefits. The experience with Foley has made GlobalPost editors more careful about where they permit their reporters to travel. Balboni says he now employs a risk-assessment service, which the company uses to evaluate the political situation in an area before accepting a story. Tracey Shelton left one of GlobalPost's full-time positions to freelance, in part, because she found it increasingly difficult to get travel to risky places approved by her editors.

They have become even more cautious when taking work from freelancers with whom they haven't worked before, procuring short-term insurance, covering expenses, and maintaining closer communication. "Anyone who's working with us in a conflict situation is kind of at the same degree

of risk," Lizzy Tomei, the site's managing editor, told me. "There aren't two different policies."

In many ways, obligation is the antithesis of a freelance contract, but Balboni argues that the realities of war zones require rethinking that relationship. "If someone offers you a story—it's so easy and you can use it," says Balboni. "But you have to be responsible and I think that's the change that [news organizations] have to get to." GlobalPost hired the security group Kroll to investigate both when Foley was captured by the Libyans, and again when he was kidnapped—in an effort that reportedly cost millions. (Balboni wouldn't reveal what they spent.) The money, though, doesn't take into account the personal toll. "I worked on Jim's case in Syria every day for 636 days," Balboni says. "It never stopped. And that changes your life."

Balboni's experience taught him that nothing can fully insulate a journalist from the realities of a more dangerous world. It may simply be impossible to assure the kind of relative safety today that correspondents once had, no matter a newsroom's resources. "Some news organizations have a security person that goes into the field with the correspondent," Balboni says. "That is certainly a nice addition but it isn't any guarantee that you're going to be protected." After all, NBC correspondent Richard Engel was traveling with a security guard when his team was intercepted by a pro-regime militia and held in Syria for five days.

For his part, Sennott believes that these challenges should be met with the very thing that the digital age stripped from newsrooms: "more resources, more training, more mentoring, more of a sense of being on a team." Though GroundTruth is still figuring out the scope of its mission, Sennott has grand plans to fill in these gaps. He's planning more group fellowships to bring young reporters into his orbit and give them something of the newsroom experience. In 2015, GroundTruth expects to add several full-time reporters and raise money to work on big projects with dedicated freelancers. "At GlobalPost the mission is to produce great news stories," he says. "At GroundTruth, it's part of our mission to mentor, too."

The problems plaguing the coverage of far-flung stories of war and crisis are much larger than a clash over business models at a startup. The future of such coverage will be determined not by two men who have faced the worst that the current reality brings. It demands an industry-wide reckoning with the fact that newsrooms need to do all they can to ensure that the reporters who risk their lives to do those stories have what they need to produce great journalism and come home alive.

The urgency couldn't be greater; the horrific deaths of James Foley and Steven Sotloff haven't deterred the ranks of eager young journalists determined to be part of the long and distinguished tradition of war reporting. "I get an email a week from people who want to go into freelancing and want to move to the Middle East," says Bohn. "There are so many young people, who are like: 'Should I buy a flak jacket? I'm graduating from Georgetown and I think I'm going to move to the Syrian border and start reporting. And I'm like, 'Oh my god!'" CJR

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ALEXIS SOBEL FITTS is a senior writer for CJR.

# The product

Chris Hughes wants to turn *The New Republic* into just another media business, after a century as a public trust

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

On Thursday, December 4, Frank Foer resigned as editor of *The New Republic*, having learned from a gossip site that the magazine's owner, former Facebook executive Chris Hughes, had already hired someone to replace him. Leon Wieseltier, who was widely known to be on the chopping block, and whose renowned back-of-the-book Hughes had already threatened, followed suit. The next morning, 15 top editors, including me, and 13 contributing editors, resigned. ¶ Most of my colleagues quit out of solidarity with Foer, whom we believed had been rudely forced out without

good reason. I shared their rage at the way Hughes had dealt with Foer. But I had stayed through other firings—most recently that of my friend Richard Just, who had recruited Hughes to buy the magazine three years ago. What made this different is that the firings were inextricably tied to Hughes' embrace of a new profit-driven model for *The New Republic* that threatened the vital role that it and other political magazines have played in American democracy.

These magazines created a public space for informed debate about the country's direction. Unlike for-profit enterprises, they were insulated from the immediate pressures of the market. They took positions, but stood above both parties and interest groups; in contrast to talk radio or many internet blogs, they based these opinions on expertise and reporting. Nor did they draw a sharp distinction between politics and culture. Some were on the left, like *The Nation* or *The Progressive*; others on the right, like *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard*.

Hughes made clear that he was abandoning this role for *The New Republic*. To supervise Foer, he hired a CEO, Guy Vidra, whose only experience on political magazines had been consulting for The Daily Caller, a far-right website whose views are antithetical to those of the magazine he was being hired to run. And with Hughes' approval, Vidra had hired a former editor of Gawker to replace Foer. In describing how they wanted to change *The New Republic*, Hughes and Vidra portrayed it as a promising high-tech

startup, which was tied to a *New Republic* investment fund for digital businesses. That represented a stark betrayal of what Hughes had promised when he had bought *The New Republic*.

*THE NEW REPUBLIC APPEARED IN NOVEMBER 1914, JUST AS* the war in Europe was beginning. Its principal founder was Herbert Croly, whose book *The Promise of American Life* had helped inspire Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party's "new nationalism." Croly wanted a journal that would reach the opinion-making classes. It wouldn't emphasize news, but rather "give certain ideals and opinions a higher value in American public opinion." It would be "disinterested"—meaning that it would be above party, politician, or interest group. Croly had planned to promote Roosevelt's candidacy for presidency in 1916, but within a year had quarreled with Roosevelt over an editorial in the magazine. "*The New Republic* never pretended to be a party organ," he wrote Roosevelt, "and its whole future success in life depends upon the impression it makes upon its readers of being able to think disinterestedly and independently."

Croly and the other editors were embracing a central tenet of upper-class progressivism: that through promoting informed opinion, based on social science, they could guide the US through the shoals of class conflict and war. The Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, *The New York Times*, and later Eugene Meyer's *Washington*



## [Political] magazines created a public space for informed debate about the country's direction.

*Post* embraced the same ideal of disinterestedness. But where the think tanks and newspapers often tried to steer clear of being identified with a particular politics, the magazines attempted to articulate a political path forward for the country.

Sometimes, they played a transformative role in shaping public debate. *The New Republic* staked out and won support for progressive internationalism in its first five years; from 1955 to 1962, *National Review* was singularly responsible for creating an American conservatism. At other times, these magazines contributed significantly to the national debate—*The New Republic* and *The Nation* in the 1930s; *The New Republic* and *The Weekly Standard* in the years leading up to George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq; and *The New Republic* again during Barack Obama's first presidential campaign. The magazines' relevance depended upon a match between its broadly articulated worldview and the actual options that the country faced.

Few of these political magazines have ever made a profit. I remember one year in the 1980s when *The New Republic* broke even. While William F. Buckley Jr. was editor of *National Review*, it never made money. Unlike general interest or specialized magazines, the political magazines have difficulty selling ads. Their circulations are not large enough, and they don't have defined readerships. Plus, a dependence on ads can also limit their editorial freedom. (Last October, Amazon pulled its ads from *The New Republic* in response to Foer's critical cover story about the company.)

In addition, political magazines suffer from Baumol's Law, which states that in some industries productivity invariably fails to keep pace with wages and salaries, so that costs constantly threaten to exceed revenues. The musicians in a string quartet are paid roughly commensurate with their education and place in society; but unlike an auto worker, they don't keep producing more products at a higher rate. Writing is that kind of profession, and while writers and

editors' pay has generally not kept pace with that of lawyers or doctors, it has risen enough to force up the costs of producing publications. The result is that without being able to depend on rising ad revenue, or higher subscription prices, these publications constantly face deficits that they have to make up either through the beneficence of their owners or through fundraising. The internet has not improved matters. While it has dramatically lowered the cost of physical production, it has taken a bite out of subscription revenue and advertising rates.

Political magazines have generally been owned by people who are willing to make up annual deficits and who are not wedded by their wealth to a particular industry that they feel they must protect from criticism. The first owners of *The New Republic* were Willard Straight, a partner in J.P. Morgan & Co., and his wife Dorothy (Whitney), a wealthy heiress. Willard Straight died of influenza in 1918, and his wife funded the magazine until 1953, when she sold it to Gilbert Harrison. Harrison and Martin Peretz, who bought the magazine in 1974, both married heiresses. Like the Straights, they tolerated annual deficits, and while being active in editorial policy, kept the magazine free, for the most part, of attachment to parties or particular business interests.

In 2001, Peretz, who said he could no longer afford the annual losses, recruited a succession of partners and investor groups. By 2012, the latest consortium had grown weary of funding the magazine and were threatening severe budget cuts and layoffs. Richard Just recruited Chris Hughes, who had been Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's roommate at Harvard, and had made \$700 million from stock in the company that he had acquired while acting as its spokesman. The editors, including me, welcomed the purchase of the magazine by Hughes, who promised not to alter its role. But over the last two years, he abandoned that role.

When Hughes took over TNR, I was on leave finishing a book, but I went out for coffee with him and we had an

extended email exchange about the magazine's future. I was pleased to talk to him. Peretz and I had not been on speaking terms, largely because of our differing views of Israel. Hughes looks even younger than his age, and displays on first meeting a cheery gee-whiz enthusiasm. But as I learned, he is perfectly capable of lashing out at subordinates if he doesn't get his way. Over the next two years, I also learned that his eagerness in seeking advice about the magazine's future concealed a yawning confusion about what he was doing.

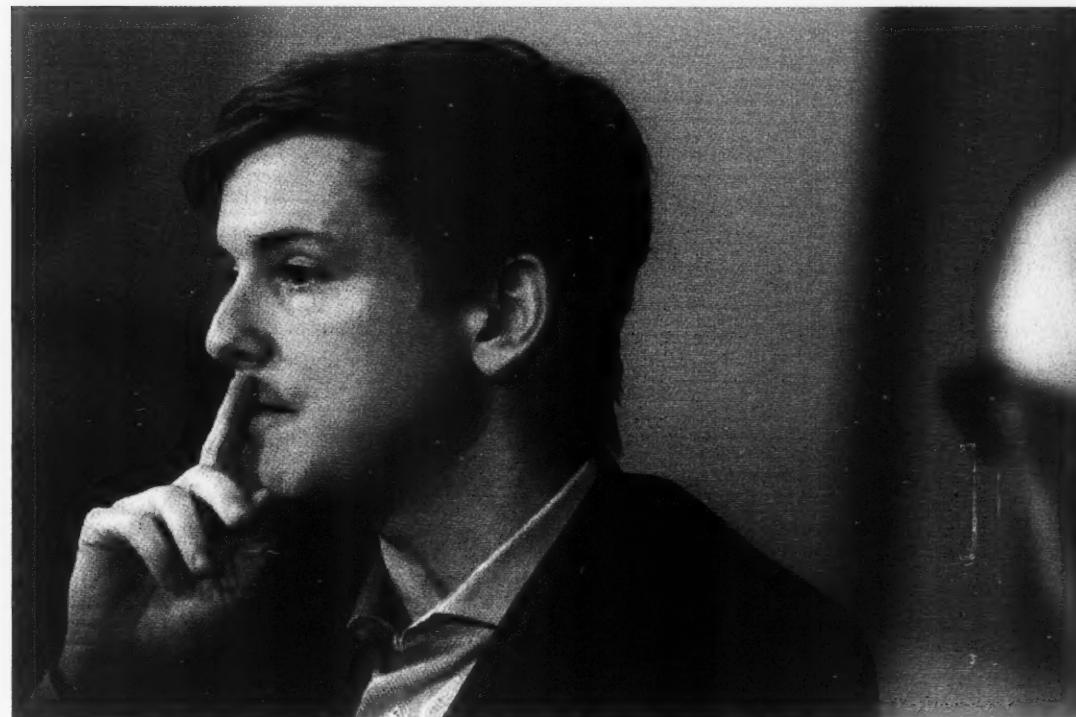
Peretz, to his credit, had understood that *TNR* would never make a profit, and one of the first things I asked the succession of owners he recruited was whether they thought a profit was possible. Several of them failed my test, but Hughes did not. He said he wasn't interested in making money, only in reducing the magazine's annual losses. Hughes had told *The New York Times* something similar. "Profit per se is not my motive. The reason I'm getting involved here is that I believe in the type of vigorous, contextual journalism that we—we in general as a society—need," he said. That was enormously reassuring to me.

Hughes also insisted that he wanted to preserve *The New Republic* as a political magazine, and seemed to understand what that meant. "The magazine has to be a political magazine—as you know better than I, *TNR* has always been a platform for a certain kind of American liberal sentiment, and that can't go away," he wrote me in April 2012. He also wanted the magazine to continue having editorials and insisted to the surprise of Just, whom he had assured of editorial control, that he wanted to write half of them himself

and approve the rest. The only areas on which Hughes and I disagreed were the back of the book—he was already unhappy with the length and subject matter of the reviews and, ironically, about the importance of the Web. While I warned that *TNR* should pay more attention to bolstering the Web and that we would sooner rather than later have to abandon the print magazine, Hughes, who was enamored of the print magazine, claimed the day of reckoning was at least seven years away.

By the end of 2012, Hughes had replaced Just with Foer, who had been the editor from 2006 to 2010. He was continuing to focus on strengthening the print magazine—a redesigned *New Republic* was slated for January 2013—but he had begun to shift away from his original conception of it as a political magazine. In a presentation to the staff, Hughes stacked the rivals to *The New Republic* on four levels, from "d" to "a." At the bottom were political magazines like *The American Prospect*, *The Nation*, and *National Review*. At top were *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, and *New York*. Hughes explained that he wanted *The New Republic* to go from "d" to "a." Some of my colleagues were excited by the plan, but that was when my doubts about Hughes' business acumen and political commitment began.

*The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *New York* are not political magazines. They are "general interest" magazines that in the case of *The New Yorker* and *New York* tilt leftward in their political coverage. They each have several hundred thousand subscribers. *The New Republic* at the time had about 40,000—down from the 100,000 or so it had had during the early 1990s. *The New Yorker* and *New York* served,



**New directions**  
After assuring the staff that he planned no major changes, Hughes began to talk about *The New Republic* as a brand—one that could include its own coffeehouses and stores, and make a profit.

and provided services to, a wealthy readership in a defined locale, which made it easier to sell ads. And over decades, *The Atlantic*'s owner had forged a network of conferences and high-priced consultancies to defray the magazine's losses. *The New Republic* had none of these advantages, but Hughes was determined to press forward with his plan.

Hughes added a score of new staff, rented high-priced offices in Washington and New York. He doubled the magazine's size and printed it on heavy, glossy paper adorned with art and photography. At the same time, Hughes now talked of *The New Republic* as a "company" with a "brand" to promote. In a speech at Harvard in January 2013, he broached a plan for *New Republic* coffeehouses and stores. He also pressed forward with *New Republic* conferences, and tried to bolster subscription sales. He said he hoped that the magazine, which had been losing several million dollars a year, would become profitable as early as 2015. "*The New Republic* can no longer be just a magazine," he declared. "We are a media company that produces live events featuring our staff and other experts, a responsive website designed for social conversations and a mobile life, audio versions of all of our work, a cutting-edge tablet app, and, of course, 20 print issues a year. We provide access to all of our products for one price to make it as simple as possible to subscribe." The magazine itself had become a "product."

Hughes shifted *The New Republic* away from its role as a political magazine. The new design did not include editorials. And in his letter to subscribers, heralding the relaunch, Hughes conspicuously excluded any mention of the magazine's commitment to liberalism or progressivism. The articles Foer chose to publish continued to reflect the magazine's political commitments, but the spirit that animated those commitments was slowly being drained away. Without editorials, editorial meetings were no longer devoted to hashing out issues. Instead, they consisted of editors suggesting what would be interesting "takes" for the magazine or the Web on the issues of the day. Once trying but invigorating, they became boring.

By early 2014, it was obvious that Hughes' plan to transform *The New Republic* into "*The New Yorker* of Washington" had failed abysmally. Subscriptions had increased only incrementally and had plateaued in the mid-double digits. As a result, Hughes now turned his attention to the Web, and tried to create what one of my colleagues called "a high-metabolism, traffic-crushing Web entity." Hughes badgered Foer and the Web editor Michael Schaffer to publish "snackable content" that would increase "unique visitors" to the website, which would help raise the price of ads. In practice, that meant abandoning the magazine's commitment to high-quality and informed writing for quick takes that would draw visitors. According to Foer, Hughes particularly liked one writer who wrote articles entitled, "It's now more Socially Acceptable for Men to Diet than Women," and "People Who Love Crossfit and ToughMudder aren't Crazy."

Hughes' final step was to hire Vidra as the CEO against Foer's wishes. Foer now had to report not only to Hughes but to Vidra. In an email introducing himself, Vidra complimented the staff on "the mindshare you've managed to grab"



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# In an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, Hughes dismissed the idea that *The New Republic* was a ‘public trust and not a business.’ But that’s exactly what it was, and he violated it.

and described *The New Republic* as a “thriving business.” A month later, Vidra held a meeting with the staff at which he explained in high-fashion digitalese his goals for the business. He put on a whiteboard an outline of the “core pillars” of the new business: “invest,” “innovate,” “metabolism,” “data-driven.” He promised to “change some of the DNA of the organization.” He called for “cost-functional collaboration.” He described *The New Republic* as a “hundred-year-old startup.” And he promised Facebook-style stock options for the employees in the new business, so that “every employee has an ownership stake in the company.”

When I asked Vidra whether the magazine still had a political role, he responded evasively that he wanted “great content across a wider spectrum.” He described himself as a “wartime CEO” and said he wanted to “break shit.” When one of the staff asked him what shit he wanted to break, he admitted that he didn’t know yet. Afterward, I asked Hughes, who had reiterated Vidra’s promise of stock options, whether he was now thinking of *The New Republic* as a media business that would make a profit, and he replied “absolutely.” Even before the fateful meeting, Vidra had already begun hunting secretly for a new editor to replace Foer.

In the wake of the firings and resignations, Ezra Klein, the editor of Vox, argued that “policy magazines” like TNR were destined to fail because of the economics of the Web, and that Hughes had been correct to shift it to the Web. But Klein, whose column reeked of self-promotion, did not understand what was at stake. *The New Republic* had never been a “policy magazine” like, say, *The National Journal*. It was a political magazine that aimed to shape where the country was headed. Vox is a snappy, digital version of a think tank bereft of ideology and able to court advertisers and corporate sponsors in a way that political magazines never could. It could potentially be profitable. Attempting to turn *The New Republic* into a profit-making vehicle would destroy it.

In addition, the controversy was not about the transition from a print to a Web magazine. Most of the editors, with the exception, perhaps, of Wieseltier, accepted that the magazine would move gradually to the Web. It was Hughes who had been slow to understand this

transition, and when he finally realized that it was necessary, attempted to make it with little thought of preserving *The New Republic*’s political and intellectual role. Looking back, I am convinced that Hughes was out of his depth from the start. Instead of allowing the magazine to change incrementally, while he learned how to run it, he attempted to transform it immediately from “d” to “a”—into “*The New Yorker of Washington*”—and when that failed, into simply another profit-making Web entity. There remains, I believe, an important role for the magazines in the ignominious “d” slot occupied by *The Nation* and *National Review*. They won’t make a profit, but with the right owner or owners, they can operate with acceptable losses and play a significant role in American democracy.

There is a historical lesson, perhaps, in Hughes’ failure at the helm of *The New Republic*. The original money for the magazine came primarily from Dorothy Whitney Straight, whose father was a leading investor in steel, street railways, and real estate. Gilbert Harrison’s wife was an International Harvester heiress, and Peretz’s wife got her money from Singer Sewing Machine. These were older American companies that emerged after the civil war. Many of their owners had been described as “robber barons.” In their old age, some of them, chastened by labor strife and public criticism, had devoted themselves to philanthropy and to what they understood as the public interest; and their heirs and heiresses, like Dorothy Straight, had followed suit.

Hughes is a member of a new generation of fabulously wealthy American capitalists who made their money in the cybersphere. Since he left Facebook in 2007, Hughes had been trying to put his fortune to good use, and turned to buying a venerable political magazine that was in danger of going under. His intentions were good. But like others from this generation, when he ventured outside of Silicon Valley, he didn’t know what he was doing, and his commitment to social responsibility turned out to be skin-deep. In an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, he dismissed the idea that *The New Republic* was a “public trust and not a business.” But that’s exactly what it was, and he violated it. **CJR**

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JOHN B. JUDIS was a senior editor at *The New Republic*.

# Pissing in his own pool

Jesse Brown gleefully punctures Canada's decorous media bubble

BY SIMON LIEM

In early 2014, news circulated online that two high-profile personalities of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation had been making paid speeches to oil lobbyists. A video surfaced in which Rex Murphy, a longtime radio host and TV pundit for the public broadcaster, stellified the industry for its “technological wizardry,” and a 2012 photo emerged of the CBC’s chief correspondent, Peter Mansbridge, behind a lectern emblazoned with the logo of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. ¶ A minor debate in the national press ensued,

in which the discussion was less about the problem of a reporter not disclosing payments from a player in one of Canada’s most contentious issues and more about the question of whether opinions had actually been bought. The answer from the journalists and their editors was a resolute “No.” (Murphy is a consistent supporter of Alberta oil sands development and a climate-change denier.) In the end, aside from wounded pride, Murphy and Mansbridge emerged unscathed. The short lifespan and blasé tone of the discussion was just another example of how Canada’s cozy media world is loathe to speak ill of itself. While the United States has mobs of writers ready to make hay of, say, Jonah Lehrer’s transgressions, its northern neighbor’s journalistic gentility allows Margaret Wente, a prominent columnist for Canada’s newspaper of record, *The Globe and Mail*, to keep her job after multiple charges of plagiarism.

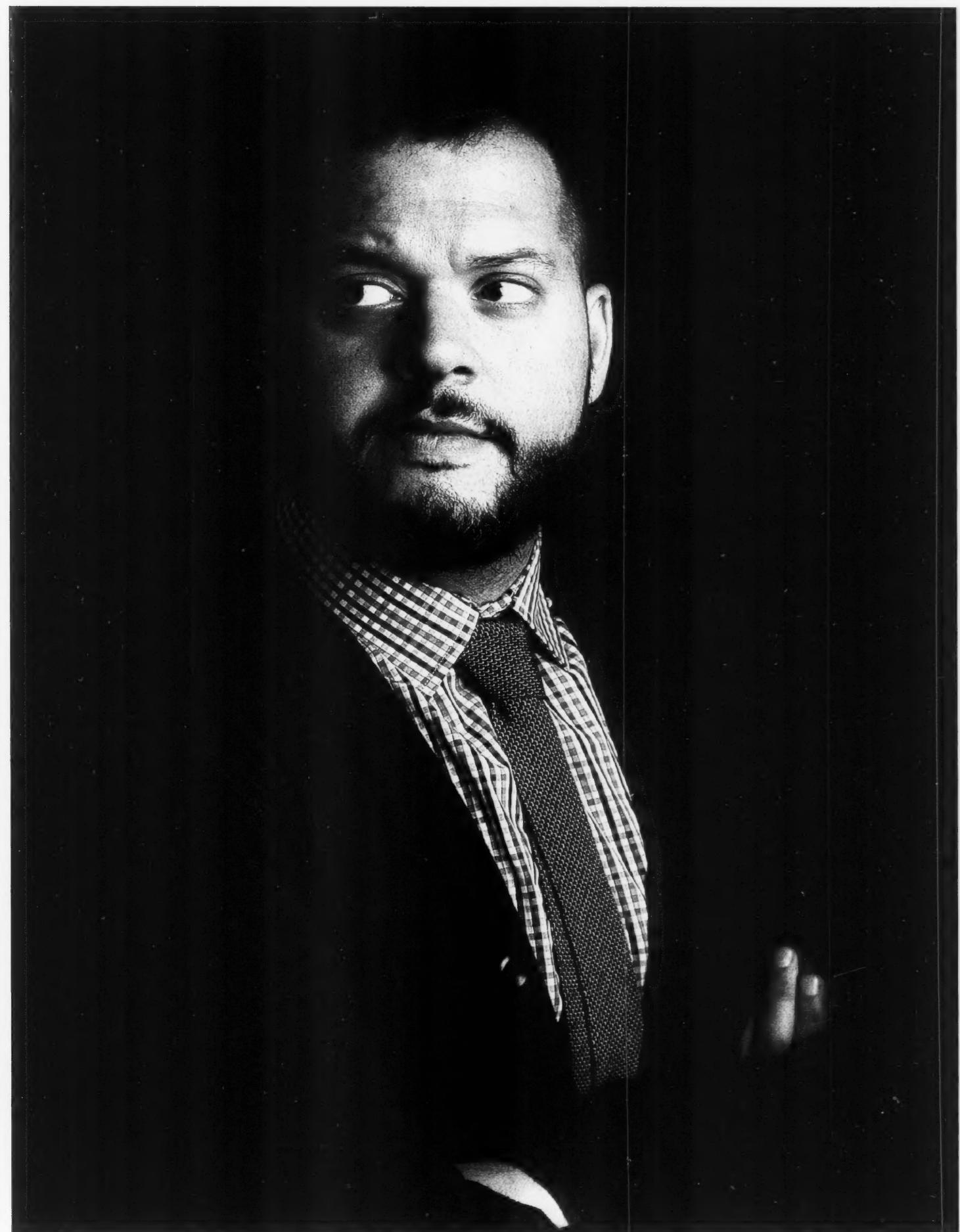
In the middle of the oil-speech controversy was an independent journalist named Jesse Brown. On his website and podcast, Canadaland, he picked up the story and added to it by confirming that Mansbridge had accepted payment from the producers association. More telling than the revelation was Brown’s source: an anonymous journalist who had done the actual reporting and handed the information to Brown. “The journalist said, ‘My news organization would not be comfortable with me reporting that,’ and this organization wasn’t the CBC,” recalled Brown. “That tells you what’s lacking in Canada.”

Brown, 37, has stepped onto the Canadian media’s tiny, packed elevator, and while others wrinkle their noses and

keep quiet, he asks, “Who farted?” In the past year, Canada-land has reported on internal memos from *The Globe* detailing its proposal to have reporters write “branded content”; revealed how a CBC reporter “stonewalled” one of Glenn Greenwald’s stories from the Edward Snowden documents; and broke news of the allegedly violent sex life of one of Canada’s most prominent media personalities. A journalist accused him of “journatrolling;” even a fan called him a “pompous dick.” But very quickly, Brown has drawn a paying audience and a handful of media insiders who feed him information that makes their colleagues—and certainly their bosses—squirm.

BROWN’S JOURNALISTIC TROUBLEMAKING BEGAN IN HIGH school, when, inspired by punk ’zines and “too many” viewings of *Pump Up the Volume*, he started his own newspaper, *Punch* (unaware of the British humor magazine of the same name). He soon got attention by publishing a poll of students ranking their teachers. The principal banned the newspaper, which turned *Punch* into a local story and won Brown a high school journalism award in 1996. A Toronto magazine called Brown an “obnoxious entrepreneur with soul.”

In the early 2000s, at the now-defunct *Saturday Night* magazine, Brown was a humorist and prankster, staging publicity stunts to hoodwink journalists. He distributed a phony press kit advertising a fake “lad mag” for the “adequate man” that received credulous national coverage before a few journalists decided to contact some of



the magazine's supposed advertisers, and *The Toronto Star* called Brown's victims for comment.

Brown moved into radio and hosted two shows for the CBC. He wrote columns for *Maclean's* and *Toronto Life*, mostly on technology issues. As he gradually became part of the establishment that he had been so keen to mock, Brown noticed a paucity of outlets for discussing the problems in Canadian media that he and his colleagues were continually whining about. The country has no one like *New York Times* columnist David Carr to scrutinize the ever-conglomerating media, and when the Prime Minister has the police prevent a Chinese journalist from asking a question at a press conference, John Oliver isn't there to skewer the absurdity.

Comparisons to America are inevitable when Canadians discuss their inadequacies. Brown wanted local counterparts to *The Daily Show* and NPR's *On the Media*. CBC TV's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *The Rick Mercer Report* occasionally tackle media issues, but usually with parody rather than satire or analysis—and their audiences are dominated by people over 50. Brown, who is tall, friendly-faced, and casual, speaks in a charmingly crass way that is at odds with the Baby-Boomer personalities of the CBC.

He began pitching a media-criticism podcast to *Maclean's* and other print outlets. CBC TV expressed interest in the idea of a media analysis show for a younger set, and, according to Brown, everyone thought that he was onto something—but no one wanted to create a venue in which the hosting organization would be forced to open itself up to jabs.

Brown's choice was to abandon the idea or pursue it independently. He managed to secure a six-month sponsorship deal from an accounting software firm, and Canadaland launched in late 2013 with a video of him and another journalist taking potshots at *The Globe's* grumbling coverage of millennials and a podcast conversation with Michael Enright, a beloved CBC radio veteran who has hosted current affairs and documentary shows for more than 20 years.

Brown took on the national press with a mix of industry news, media analysis, and gossip. It's hard to imagine the invective of such fire-breathers as Glenn Greenwald or Matt Taibbi having a place in Canada's prim news establishment, but Brown is attempting to glean from those styles a method for elucidating the public in complicated stories. "I am unapologetically sensational," he says. "I'm trying to get people to engage in wonky issues." While *The Globe* expressed confusion over the non-reaction to news that the country's NSA counterpart had been pulling Canadian citizens' metadata from public Wi-Fi connections, Brown placed the blame squarely on the media's failure to present the subject with the appropriate amount of "heat."

Part of what made him stand out immediately was that Brown spoke in a voice different from the standard Canadian cardboard broadcast tone—that is to say, he sounded like a normal person. And he has been able to elicit that quality from his guests. Hearing Enright call *The Globe* a "lousy newspaper" and acknowledge the CBC's fear of examining itself is a bizarre experience for those who grew up knowing only his on-air gravitas. Such veteran journalists as Linden MacIntyre and Susan Delacourt have also spoken candidly

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## CBC Radio host Jian Ghomeshi was charged with sexual assault a month after Brown's story broke.

with Brown about their jobs in a way that is thoroughly unfamiliar to popular audiences in Canada.

"There's a kind of coziness to the media culture in Canada," says Jeffrey Dvorkin, a one-time guest of Canadaland and a journalism professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough. (He also is a former editor at the CBC and ombudsman for NPR.) "Part of it is because media organizations are in such a precarious place, as they are in the United States, but the economy of scale means that everything is a little bit more fragile in Canada. Media criticism is seen as pissing in your own swimming pool."

The freshness of Canadaland has allowed Brown to play off of the tension among frustrated and worried journalists. In 2014, the CBC announced that it would have to cut \$130 million from its budget because of a reduction in federal funding and the loss of broadcast rights for the National Hockey League. Thousands of people were likely to lose their jobs.

CBC management had an online Q&A session last summer with employees about the coming changes, which was published on an internal website. A CBC North reporter forwarded it to Brown. "I don't think it was scandalous information. If anything, I was just trying to illustrate how little we knew," says the reporter, who compared management's answers to "an octopus creating a blast of ink before swimming away."

Brown's willingness to violate the national media's decorum has made him the outlet for leaks about the inside workings of the mainstream press. He reported from a source inside *The Globe* that the top editor went over the heads of the editorial board and at the last moment switched the paper's endorsement for the Ontario provincial election. Canadaland published a story on Prime Minister Stephen Harper's neglect of Arctic issues that had been spiked by a national news organization.

Brown's style borders on scurrilous and makes him prone to speculation and hasty reporting. When Canadaland published an article on Glenn Greenwald's disappointment in his partnership with *The Globe*, Brown initially wrote that the former editor of the paper "ignored" his request for comment, when in fact Brown had just missed the editor's email. He ran a correction a few hours after the article was posted, but even minor mistakes in Canada can be devastating for journalists who lack libel insurance or a backing organization.

In Canada, plaintiffs in libel suits—public figures or not—must only prove that the statements in question were published,

defamatory, and referred to them. From that point on, the publisher and journalist are guilty until proven innocent.

In 2012, Conrad Black, the Canadian press baron, launched a \$1.2 million lawsuit against Random House Canada for publishing the book *The Thieves of Bay Street*, about his exploits while running Hollinger International Inc., the former publisher of *The Chicago Sun-Times*. One of the allegedly libelous statements was the author's reference to Black's "corporate kleptocracy," a phrase taken from a publicly available report, filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The defenses against a libel charge are limited, and until recently the law often required journalists to prove the truth of all impugned statements, which meant that errors in reporting or the inability to provide courtroom evidence could invalidate any defense. In 2009, a pair of rulings from the Supreme Court of Canada granted publishers and reporters the defense of "responsible communication," which allows defendants to beat a libel suit if they can prove that the published material was in the public interest and responsibly reported.

"Responsible communication" may mean suits like Black's will ultimately fail, but the defense has not been rigorously tested and the low standards for launching a libel lawsuit, warranted or not, still play into the calculations of journalists and publishers.

In spring 2014, Brown began to investigate allegations that one of CBC Radio's most popular hosts, Jian Ghomeshi, had been using his fame to meet women whom he then sexually assaulted. Brown feared that if he published a story based on anonymous sources on Canadaland, he would be sued and characterized as a crackpot blogger. So he took it to *The Toronto Star*. Working with the paper's lead investigative reporter, Kevin Donovan, they continued the investigation until last September, when they pulled back, in part because none of the three women they interviewed had gone to the police or were willing to be identified.

The story was in limbo, and Brown was unwilling to pursue it alone. When he contacted Ghomeshi, his lawyers threatened to sue should the allegations go public. "I got two kids and a house," says Brown, "and this is asking me to put my money where my mouth is."

Then, in late October, Brown broke the news on Twitter that the CBC had put Ghomeshi on indefinite leave. The host attempted to get ahead of the story and posted a Facebook message claiming that he had been punished because of his interest in BDSM, which came to the CBC's attention only because of false allegations made by "a jilted ex-girlfriend and a freelance writer [Brown]." *The Star* published Brown and Donovan's story several hours after Ghomeshi's explanation went up, saying that the Facebook statement gave the reporting legitimacy.

It was easily Brown's biggest hit in his nascent career as the scourge of Canadian media. After it was published, a number of other women came forward, some publicly, to speak of similar experiences with Ghomeshi, who was charged with sexual assault a month after the story broke. Brown's Twitter followers tripled and downloads of his podcast spiked.

BROWN PAYS \$460 A MONTH FOR A SHARED STUDIO SPACE in downtown Toronto that includes access to a recording

room and space for his desk. He records the podcast in a small, sweaty booth littered with mic cables and keyboards. Guests sit across from Brown with two TV trays between them supporting a laptop and a mishmash of recording equipment. The booth narrows to a point so that in much of it one can touch both walls at the same time. For the first year, Brown (with help from an intern) was Canadaland's sole editor, producer, pundit, and reporter. He only recently hired a producer to assist with the podcast.

After the first six-month sponsorship deal elapsed, advertisements by Squarespace and Audible.com helped cover costs, but Canadaland was operating at a loss and consuming much of Brown's time. In September, he wasn't sure whether Canadaland could continue despite its growing popularity. Episodes of his podcast were being downloaded on average between 10,000 and 15,000 times.

In October, Brown launched a crowdfunding campaign in which listeners could sign on as monthly subscribers, while all of his content would remain free. He was not interested in the intermittent blasts of cash that come with typical crowdfunding models; he needed Canadaland to be a stable business. In little more than a week, he had \$4,000 a month committed from nearly 1,000 subscribers, most of whom were paying between \$4 and \$7 per month. Along with supplemental ad revenue, he says that allows him to pursue the job full time.

By December, he had 1,551 subscribers paying him \$7,686 a month—\$3,686 of which will go to build a freelance fund to feature more stories by other journalists.

In contrast to his journalistic flamboyance, Brown's approach to staying alive in Canada's frigid media landscape has been to build his business slowly. "I don't have any designs on building an empire and immediately hiring 10 people and having a slick office space," says Brown. And despite fielding new interest from investors, he believes the core of his funding has to be from his audience.

The Ghomeshi story has helped on that front—and on other fronts, too. Downloads of his podcast—which he upped to two shows a week—jumped to around 20,000 in its wake. Paid subscribers continued to increase. He assigned more stories to freelancers. Canadaland began to consistently rank high in Canada's iTunes podcasts charts, sometimes beating out *This American Life* and *Serial*.

When Brown hits the \$10,000-a-month mark, which he is closing in on faster than expected, he has promised his audience that he will build his own news outlet, featuring daily content, another podcaster to cover only politics, and contracted freelancers who will go after the pile of leads Brown gets but can't chase himself.

At this point, Brown will either manage to build a viable business or do something else. Having scrutinized so many of his former employers, the "stink" he put on himself would be hard to wash off. "If it didn't work out," he says, "I would not be able to return to the Canadian media." **CJR**

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SIMON LIEM is a journalist in Montreal, Quebec. His last piece for CJR was on comedian and podcaster Marc Maron. His work has also appeared in Harper's Magazine and *The Walrus*.



The digital counterrevolution is underway in Europe, where national governments and bureaucrats in Brussels are enacting measures to curtail the power of American tech giants, such as the controversial “right to be forgotten,” and challenging the fairness of Google’s search-engine criteria. In May 2014, a coalition of European telecoms, media companies, and other businesses formed an anti-Google lobbying group called the Open Internet Project. This lobby gained an important ally with the ascension of the new European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who has stressed the need for European competitors to the Silicon Valley giants. Juncker’s election was widely credited to the efforts of an influential press baron: **Mathias Döpfner**.

Döpfner, 51, is the chief executive of Axel Springer, Europe’s largest publishing company. Born in the former West Germany, Döpfner got his start in journalism as an 18-year-old freelance music critic. After getting a PhD in musicology, he worked his way up through German newspapers until he landed his current job in 2002. His path

was “very unusual, very un-German,” Döpfner says. “From a musician and a musicologist and a journalist to a CEO of a media company—that is actually not allowed.”

Döpfner initially gained some notice outside Germany for returning Axel Springer to profitability and expanding its footprint in Europe. In 2006, he joined Time Warner as a corporate director. But it wasn’t until last spring that Döpfner picked the fight that made him a kind of international spokesman for the organized resistance to Big Tech.

On April 17, 2014, he published an open letter to Google chairman Eric Schmidt in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which had recently published an op-ed by Schmidt that equated European publishers’ resistance to Google to an “attack on the entire Internet and its magic.” Döpfner’s blunt response caused an international stir. His arguments sounded more like a fervid dispatch from Julian Assange than a careful statement from an international media tycoon. “We are afraid of Google,” Döpfner wrote. “I must state this very clearly and frankly, because few of my colleagues dare do so publicly.”

# Teuton vs. Titans

Axel Springer chief Mathias Döpfner predicts the US will follow Europe in fighting the dominance of Google, Facebook, and other digital bullies

BY COREY PEIN

CARSTEN KOALL / GETTY IMAGES

He accused Google and Facebook of having a “totalitarian” mentality, like the “Stasi or other secret police in service of a dictatorship.” He claimed that Google, with its investments in drone fleets, internet-enabled appliances, and driverless cars, wants to build a “superstate that can navigate its floating kingdom undisturbed by any and all nation-states and their laws.”

In subsequent speeches, Döpfner framed the discussion in a way that’s particularly relevant for journalists and publishers: “Will technology companies be the new and only distributor of content?” he said in a keynote at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum in August. “Will they control the process of weighing and evaluating events? Or will the traditional publishing houses manage to uphold the traditional journalistic code as a competitive advantage?”

**Corey Pein** interviewed Döpfner for CJR in October at his offices in Berlin. They discussed how to avoid a dystopian, Google-controlled future, Axel Springer’s new partnership with Politico, and why he thinks America will soon join Europe in the struggle against digital dictatorship. (A month

later, Axel lost a round when it was forced to opt back in to Google News after its Web traffic plummeted.)

**It wasn’t Google that tapped Angela Merkel’s cellphone. Are you more afraid of Google than of the NSA?** It is not a question of who I’m more afraid of, I just thought it was important to have a debate about tech monopolies and their role in the digital ecosystem. If you reach a certain market size—market domination or a quasi-monopoly status—there may be new challenges with regard to transparency and fairness of search criteria.

It was on the agenda because of the Brussels cartel case [before the European Commission, concerning Google’s internet-search dominance]. I thought that a response to Eric Schmidt’s remarks was a good way to open a public debate. That debate happened, I’m glad it happened, and honestly speaking I’m now a little tired of talking about it, because I have to run a media company and Google is but one of the topics that we have to deal with; it is not my personal hobby.

**The debate has gone farther in Europe than in the US. You said there are other media executives who had this anxiety but have not spoken out publicly. Why would people who buy ink by the barrel be reticent?** The debate has opened people's mouths and freed up the courage to express thoughts. That is very important because, again, it is about a healthy, competitive environment. The question about transparent and fair search criteria is crucial. If you own a 90 percent market share—or, in some countries, even 99 percent—you are de facto the entry gate to the digital business world. And if a player in that position can discriminate against competitors, or promote its own products without fully disclosing the criteria, then this can lead to unhealthy market domination. This is the fundament of the Brussels case and that is why there are so many businesses affected. It is not mainly an issue of publishers, of media companies. A lot of industries are involved, in particular e-commerce.

**Why stop with search criteria?** My letter was not motivated by a desire to lobby for our own purpose. Of course we are defending our interest on the side of content, copyright, and publishers' rights. That is basically a media-oriented debate. The debate about search criteria is interesting for the entire society.

**How did you come to this perspective, which is distinct from where a lot of media executives in the US are at in terms of their response to the growing power of Google, Facebook, and Amazon?** It's interesting to see the difference between the US debate on data protection, data security, transparency and how this issue is handled in Europe. In the US, the perception is, "What's the problem? If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear. We can share everything with everybody, and being able to take advantage of data is great." In Europe it's totally different. There is a huge concern about what institutions—commercial institutions and political institutions—can do with your data. The US representatives tend to say, "Those are the back-looking Europeans; they have an outdated view. The tech economy is based on data."

I'm saying this as probably the most pro-American European that exists, and somebody who is in his soul probably more American than European: In this case, the Europeans are ahead of the game. I definitely cannot imagine that the lighthouse of freedom in the world, the United States of America—where individual rights are the fundament of the creation of the society—will accept in the long term a society where you have total transparency of personal data and, with that, total transparency of the individual and, with that, unlimited possibilities to control and abuse individuals' data and behavior.

I bet that in 10 years we will have more sensitivity to the matter in America than in Europe. As it was in the case of affirmative action, America used to be the most racist country in the world, and it's now probably the most concerned about diversity. As was the case with regard to food and health, America used to have some of the unhealthiest food in the world and now probably has one of the most sensitive approaches toward fitness, health food, and so on. So America confronts problems sometimes a little later, but it solves them more quickly, and in a more pragmatic way.

In Europe there is more sensitivity because of the history. The Europeans know that total transparency and total control of data leads to totalitarian societies. The Nazi system and the socialist system were based on total transparency. The Holocaust happened because the Nazis knew exactly who was a Jew, where a Jew was living, how and at what time they could get him; every Jew got a number as a tattoo on his arm before they were gassed in the concentration camps.

**What evidence do you see that the mindset is beginning to change in America?** The reason for my optimism is two-fold. First, I believe in the instincts of freedom in American society. The second reason is, I'm talking a lot to young people living and working in America, in particular in the tech industries. Those are the real insiders, who really know how the machinery of the digital economy works. And the younger they are, and the more competent they are, the more skeptical they get about certain things.

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**'Europeans know that total transparency and total control of data lead to totalitarian societies. The Nazi system and the socialist system were based on total transparency.'**

Let me give you one concrete example: Snapchat [an app that allows you to send photos and other media that will disappear after a short time]. This is a super-successful young company that is probably so successful because I'm not the only person who's a little scared about what could happen, 15 years from now, to a photo you shared with family and friends that is in the hands of other people who want to do something with it that has nothing to do with your original intentions. So Snapchat is for me a positive example that there is something happening.

**How does this concern inform your approach at Axel Springer? Because when you took charge, you set a digital strategy very early.** In 2002 we defined the strategy of digitization. Today, more than 50 percent of our sales come from digital businesses, 66 percent of our operating profits are coming from digital, and roughly three-quarters of our revenues are coming from digital. We are probably the most digitized traditional media company in the world. And it is from that position I am making my remarks: As a beneficiary of digitization, not as someone who is skeptical of it in general. This is very important to understand. We want to benefit. We want to become the leading digital publisher, and that means remaining a publisher—so the business model is based on content—but with digital as the basis of basically everything.

**You did something different to achieve this position: You sent Axel Springer managers to Silicon Valley to learn how they did things. In America the approach has been, “Let’s hire a consultant to tell us what we should do.”** It’s well known in Europe that we are not fans of strategic consultancies and restructuring consultancies. I think that’s something that management should do themselves. We are more in that camp of trying to learn and benefit and collect experience and information all over the world. If you are talking about our digitization and the Silicon Valley experience, this is just one tiny element and we should not overrate it. But yes, we sent three of our top executives—our most important editor, our most important business guy, and our most important IT guy—to Silicon Valley. They were living for nine months like students in a dormitory, and were simply asked to connect themselves with the most interesting people in the Valley, learn from their mentality, learn what we can do differently. They came back as cultural change agents.

**It makes me think how Yahoo, Amazon, and Facebook are all hiring journalists, but they don’t have the culture of journalism.** I have serious doubts whether a company is able to change its genetic code and adopt a totally different business and culture. I doubt that a tech company becomes a content company, and I doubt that a content company becomes a tech company. Of course, for a content business, technology is a lot more important today. But I think the huge opportunity in the digital world—and this creates my optimism with regard to the future of journalism—is that there is a whole new era of launches, of new content products and content companies. It is a bit like in the 19th century when the big newspapers were built, or after the Second

World War when in Europe new magazines and new print products were created. Print is now over. I mean, the print business will still exist and make money but there is no growth in the print business. The crucial question is, are we able to emancipate the *idea* of a newspaper from paper. And I’m working for that objective basically every day.

You can debate, “Is BuzzFeed serious enough to play a journalistic role?” Perhaps in 10 years, they will be more relevant than *The New York Times*. You can debate the possibilities of whether smaller companies can really replace the big brands. We have just invested [\$20 million] in a Silicon Valley digital magazine project called Ozy. They have in a very short order gained a tremendous readership with serious journalism that’s presented in a fashionable and modern and edgy way that is more attractive for a younger audience than a traditional brand like *The Washington Post*.

Another example is Politico. We have agreed to roll out Politico in Europe, based on a joint venture. Look at Politico. Today it is one of the most influential platforms for political journalism in the United States. It employs 350 people [Politico confirms “more than 300”]. It’s a serious source of credible and trustworthy and relevant journalism, and it’s basically all digital. I think journalism has tremendous opportunities if we, the publishers and the journalists, are doing our job right.

**Politico is somewhat peculiar to the insider culture of DC. What makes you think that will work in Europe?** Politico started in Washington with an approach that said, “We want to be on the office desks of the 10 most relevant people in Washington. If we reach them, we will sooner or later reach the 100,000 most influential people interested in politics, and then it can become a huge brand and a serious business.” Of course, Washington politics is not a mass-market interest in the United States. But the crowd that is interested in that is large enough to build an important brand. And now in Europe I think the need is even greater. You have Brussels at the political center, and 28 member countries that are represented there. You have people in the member countries, and in countries that may want to become members. So there is a huge interest in what is happening in Brussels and in the political centers of these member countries, and there is not a European platform to capture that. So I think [Politico Europe] has the potential also to broaden and be a comparable success. But of course we have to see.

**Concerning the Open Internet Project: I’m not sure that everyone is going to be persuaded that this anti-Google lobbying effort is not simply about defending the commercial self-interest of Axel Springer and the rest of the companies that have signed on. What do you think a “healthy digital ecosystem” looks like? What room is there for smaller, independent publishers who, right now, may think they get a better deal from the Googles and the Amazons of the world?** If you create this dependency on a few monopolists it’s a very shortsighted approach. A healthy ecosystem is one in which you have some very strong and very relevant infrastructure and tech players. But at the same time you have a big number of smaller or mid-sized content brands, or even large content

brands that are competing against one another for the best argument, the best story, the best investigation, the best service. And this variety of content brands can and should have very different business models. Some may offer their content for free and monetize just by advertising. That is particularly successful for more news-oriented, general-interest approaches. Others—those more premium-content brands that produce substantial and expensive content; investigations that involve travel and lots of research—could be monetized by subscription and advertising revenues. Others may test auction models. I think there is no limit for various business models.

I think the idea that we should have an internet in which all content is available to everybody for free is just nonsense. This is pure ideology or pure lobbying by some very few businesses that take advantage of the content others have generated at great cost. They take it for free and monetize it to advertising clients in a different context. That is not a sustainable ecosystem, because sooner or later the content producers will stop producing, and then the content aggregators or search engines or pirate brands cannot exist. In the long run, you need several sources of revenue, and the paying reader is an important pillar of that.

**There's been nothing—no law, no regulatory force—to stop publishers from experimenting with pay models. So what's the problem? Isn't it simply that there is a larger audience for free content and a smaller audience for paying content?** That is exactly how it is going to develop. On the way, though, there are some issues that need to be resolved having to do with a legal system. If publishers' rights and copyright are nonexistent, and everybody can take whatever he or she wants, then there is no incentive to invest in expensive content. You need a certain fairness in the usage of other people's content. I think it's wonderful that you can share and link information, and the network effects provide wonderful opportunities not only for readers but also for journalists. But I think in a new digital economy we need to develop new and fair rules that help content and services of the highest possible quality to flourish, and that help the largest number of players to flourish.

**Is there any role for the public sector?** I'm against the role of the public sector. I think media should be private competition. Only media that are a good and successful business will in the long run be independent media. Media that depend on state money will be in the long run state media. I'm also against media as a recipient of foundation money and philanthropic initiatives. I think journalism is not a philanthropic issue. Journalism is essential to society.

**But you do see a role for governments to ensure that the competition is fair?** Yes, yes, yes. And that does not mean overregulation or crazy regulation, it just means an appropriate legal framework. And nobody knows exactly today what that is. It's a process.

**Is any government—the European Commission, any public agency—up to the task?** No. And I don't blame them. They can't be. Because progress is happening so fast. Technology

developments are changing so fast that it is hard for the most up-to-date businesspeople to keep the pace. How should politicians understand everything? What we have to do is define the priorities. There is now in Europe, for example, a commission for the digital agenda. There are three people in the commission, I think, dealing with digital issues. That's a good sign. That at least shows me that they've started to understand the importance. In every government there should be a widespread competence about digital developments, because in the end it is eminently political.

**Hasn't the process of consolidation and transformation happened so fast that the dystopian scenario you've described is already largely in place? The Obama administration is a great example of a campaign and a presidency that thinks it can circumvent the news media. The tech companies have a coalition of governments and consumers who basically go along with whatever they want. Isn't it already too late?** I don't think that it's too late. I'm a structural and cultural optimist. There is always the movement of the pendulum. And the pendulum may have swung at the moment a little too far to the direction of, "Actually, we don't need journalism, we don't need big brands, we only need direct communication with the consumer"—very decentralized, fragmented structures. I'm 100 percent sure the pendulum will swing back toward credible brands, brands that take responsibility; toward experts that know how to write great stories and do the research and that take responsibility when they publish inaccurate information. This is also in the interest of the consumer. If you rely entirely on social media, how could you distinguish rumor from fact? Please don't get me wrong: I think social media are a tremendous enrichment of journalism and communication and of society. But they are not going to replace professional journalism. There is a growing hunger for trustworthy, branded content.

**If Europe enacts more regulations such as those you've suggested, the internet in Europe could start to look very different from the internet in the US. Doesn't balkanization threaten some of the promise of these new technologies?** First of all, I'm not advocating more regulation as such. In general, I'm a fan of minimalistic regulation. The second point is that we need global solutions. The digital economy is an entirely global economy. National law and national regulation can be a starting point, but it's never going to resolve anything.

**That's my point, though: Russia and China already are apart from the internet we see in the West. Isn't there a risk that, if America and Europe pursue different courses, that global connection gets broken?** A break between the connection of Europe and America would be terrible, and we have to do everything to avoid that. If some non-democracies like China and Russia are trying to go another way, a protectionist way, a non-democratic way, a way where there's no free press, they can do it. We will see in the long run which system is going to prevail: democracy or dictatorship.

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# **'I'm against the role of the public sector. I think media should be private competition. I am also against media as a recipient of foundation money and philanthropic initiatives.'**

**There's a different challenge to democracy, though, and it's something you've alluded to: The idea that the larger digital companies are beyond the scope of government control, and therefore of democracy.** Well, we cannot blame a very successful company for wanting to conquer the world. That's the healthy instinct of every entrepreneur. But it's the duty of people living in a democracy—"the consumer"—and of politicians to set limits and define interests. And if a company thinks that it doesn't need to comply with existing laws because it has such great ideas, that also should be a breach of law in the digital world. Just because somebody's pretending to do something good, or genuinely wants to do something good, it does not allow everything.

**Is there anyone in the United States who could carry this torch?** I think that this is not only a European debate, or a Europe-against-America debate. I feel it, I see it, I hear it when I am in America, and I'm there at least once a month. It is already a debate in America. Perhaps the mass audience is not participating. But the tech elites, the younger people, intellectual people are. Why do you ask if you are not interested?

**But among your cohort, though—the executives, the people at the top—is there anyone in America? Because it's fine for all the young techies to have skepticism, but they don't have that kind of platform and influence.** I have had many conversations and I could give you names but I think that would not be appropriate. My experience is, the younger the people, the more interested they are. If you are in your twenties, then people start to really think, "What's the world going to look like in 10 or 20 years?" If you do that then you automatically have to deal with these issues. That is true for journalists, who of course have the particular duty to express that and to make other people interested—but not only for journalists. It is also true for entrepreneurs. It is true for tech people, for developers. It is true for a younger generation of politicians and intellectuals, scientists. We do not rely on two or three representatives of the old guard to have that discussion. It's a discussion of the young generation.

**Apart from the conversations you alluded to, do you have any examples?** Again, look to the business world, to the companies that are having a very successful start. The range

goes from Alex Karp's company, Palantir, to Snapchat. Not to mention many new startups and companies that are trying to build safer alternatives, where data is more protected. The fact that there are these companies that are more data security-oriented, more privacy-oriented, shows me there is a debate, there is a reaction, there is something happening with regard to data. On the content and the journalistic side, there is Vox Media and Flipboard and Ozy and Politico. There is a lot happening at the moment. Just look to the recent valuations. Vice Media is \$2.5 billion. Marc Andreessen has invested \$50 million in BuzzFeed at \$850 million valuation. Why do they do it? Because they think it has no future? No. They believe in it.

**Doesn't that reflect a certain amount of bubble investing?** The bubbles are elsewhere. I think the content industry is at the beginning of appropriate valuation. And it reflects growing interest in that industry and in the need for great content—be it an aggregator, a branded digital magazine, or any other innovative concept where you combine algorithm-driven content and human curation, like Digg.

**Is there anything you want to add?** For a company like Axel Springer, the digital economy provides many more opportunities than threats. It also provides new markets. In the analog world, national boundaries were logistical boundaries. To launch a newspaper in France you had to own printing plants, or have contracts with printing plants. You had to organize distribution, and that was difficult to impossible. In the digital world, the only border you have is language. Apart from that, the world is your market. Because of that, entering the English-speaking world is a big priority for us. You can interpret the investments in Ozy, in Politico, and in other English-speaking initiatives to come in that context.

**There's a bit of opportunism in that, right? Because the same problems that have put the US media on its knees before the likes of Google and Facebook must have lowered the price to enter the US market for a company like Springer.** Absolutely. The coin very often has two sides. **CJR**

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# Ideas + Reviews

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SECOND READ

## Dreaming of Michael Lewis

*The New New Thing* could have aged poorly, but it endures as an example of the author at his understated best

BY MIMI SWARTZ

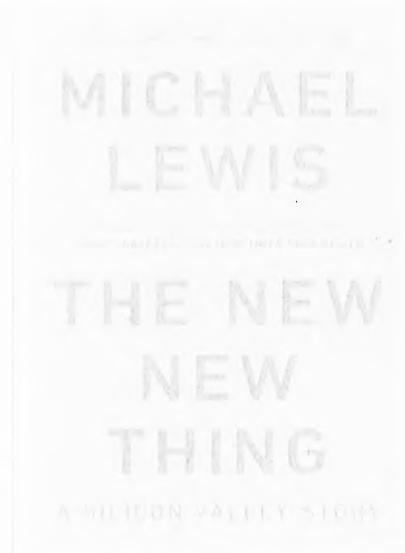
A few weeks ago, a friend and fellow journalist gave me a talking to over the phone. I was stuck on a structural point in the book I am writing, and as I grappled with possible solutions while ignoring all the advice I'd asked her for, her patience wore thin. "Stop trying to be Malcolm Gladwell," she finally told me. Then, for effect, she repeated herself, stressing the point in a wireless version of a finger wag. "You're not Malcolm Gladwell."

What struck me most about this exchange was not the bluntness of the advice—at this point I have the mid-career professional's relatively impervious hide—but the underlying assumption. *Malcolm Gladwell*? Where had that come from? As far as I knew, I had never tried to write like Malcolm Gladwell. I like his work, but I am not one of those writers who pores over every new Gladwell piece in *The New Yorker* to decode the secrets of his genius. I do not sit around, like some other writers I know, and try to channel him when I start a magazine story in hopes that I might turn that very piece into an international bestseller with an understated but immediately recognizable black and white cover.

There are many reasons why I do not occupy my time in this way, but the most important one is this: I am too busy obsessing over Michael Lewis' work. If my friend had told me to stop trying to be Michael Lewis, I would have been much more hurt and much more defensive because then she would have been right. In the dead of night, when I wake up trying to figure out why a particular section or passage or even sentence is DOA, I ask myself this question: What would Michael Lewis do?

Of course, I do not know Michael Lewis, so I have no idea what he would really do. I blithered like a bombed bobby-soxer the one time I actually managed to meet him, therefore missing any sage advice he might have had for me. Lewis is, for me, the writer's equivalent of a child's imaginary friend, except that in my imagination he isn't exactly friendly and, alas, I am not a child. Fantasy Michael Lewis is the person who always gets a source talking on the first try, who never has trouble facing the blank page or the blinking cursor, and who never makes the kind of dunderheaded mistake that encourages someone to put in a call to their lawyer. He doesn't need to make revisions because his work flows effortlessly from his mind to the page. Editors barely pick up a pencil because the finished work is flawless.

Fantasy Michael Lewis also likes to remind me that the real Michael Lewis is wealthy and successful in a way I can only dream of, because he, unlike me, has written innumerable instant bestsellers that have, naturally, been turned into major motion pictures that have, yes, been nominated for and won Oscars for the people lucky enough to be involved with them. (See: *Moneyball* and *The*



## Jim Clark may be a royal pain in the ass to everyone he encounters, but the empathy Lewis creates keeps him from being one to the reader.

*Blind Side*; Lewis is currently working on the screenplay for his first book, *Liar's Poker*.) Fantasy Michael Lewis is, in short, the embodiment of all the demented notions that I allow to run wild every time I have a deadline looming. This experience is common among writers. I suspect my friend spends a lot of time listening to Fantasy Malcolm Gladwell prattle on and on about the tiresome renovations of his summer house in the Hamptons.

Anyway. In recent years, the real Michael Lewis has been attacked, as mega-successful writers often are, for committing various sins, including journalistic laziness, falling much too in love with his subjects, being insensitive to the Holocaust, and—probably one of the worst sins in American life—misunderstanding the history of the major leagues in *Moneyball*. It seemed like a reasonable time, then, to return to my favorite Lewis book, *The New New Thing*, to see whether my love was still true.

In other words, mired in a book of my own, I thought I might turn to Fantasy Michael Lewis to help me out.

**THE NEW NEW THING HOLDS UP JUST** fine. It came out in October 1999, before the collapse of the dot-com bubble. The book's subtitle is *A Silicon Valley Story*, and if you haven't read it, you should know that Lewis did not produce a long, ponderous, extensively footnoted

history about the epicenter of the tech world. Nor did he include helium-laced quotes from the founders of Oracle and Microsoft and a zillion or so other guys. Instead, he found one guy through which he could tell the story of that incomprehensible time in American life: Jim Clark, then the compelling, already insanely rich founder of Netscape, the once famous Web browser that, not so surprisingly, no longer exists. These days, an author's ability to find just the right person to explain whatever global phenomenon he or she wants to explain has become a journalistic cliché; 15 years ago, when Lewis used that device to show how the tech boom would change the world, it was a novelty.

In order to write the book, he essentially moved in with Clark and his long-suffering, now third ex-wife, Nancy Rutter, in order to chronicle the former's twin obsessions: building the world's largest and completely computerized sailboat, and remaking the rules of US capitalism in his own chaotic image. I can only imagine how Lewis must have felt when he found, or decided to focus on, Clark, a man whose wealth, intelligence, and paranoia, combined with what seems to be a confounding case of ADHD, had irresistible and nearly unlimited literary potential. I'm pretty sure, too, that Lewis' decision to cross the Atlantic with Clark on his oversized high-tech

sailboat created some ambivalence in his editor, something along the lines of, *Great story!—we'll have a bestseller as long as you don't die on the crossing.*

Fortunately, Lewis didn't die, and instead produced a short, relentlessly funny book that also manages to be a near perfect account of a particularly nutty time in American life, a period when it seemed like everyone was going to get insanely rich if they could just figure out what something called the internet was for. All these years later, *The New New Thing* is just as much fun to read retrospectively as a great history of a period that did, in fact, change the life of virtually every person on the planet. It's all there—the entrepreneurs, the engineers, the geeks, the venture capitalists, and more, groping toward a future that everyone now takes for granted.

Lewis captures this moment in just 268 pages—one reason the book was featured so prominently in airport bookstores. Imagine discovering a very good looking, very witty, and very smart person seated next to you in coach class: Michael Lewis in book form is just that kind of companion. One minute your chin is being assaulted by the seatback in front of you, and then next you are immersed in chapter one, visualizing the mast of Clark's multi-million-dollar yacht teeter-tottering on the North Sea's 15-foot waves—as

it happens, a pretty good metaphor for what would happen to the rest of us once Jim Clark had his way.

Lewis' rich, carefully observed portrait of Clark is the heart of the book, and it still serves as a great example for any writer—even a mid-career professional—intent on bringing a subject alive on the page. He doesn't start out by giving the reader a short Clark biography or résumé—your standard second section or chapter two that begins with a scene at the hero's childhood home along with the date of his birth. Instead, Lewis plunges the reader immediately into Clark's world, producing the same disorienting effect his subject had on everyone. Sure, Lewis gives a nod to Clark's enormous wealth—he was a billionaire at a time when there weren't as many of them crowding the *Forbes* list—but Lewis also manages to provide a window into his self-made subject's tangled psyche.

Like a lot of very rich men, Clark plowed his money into vehicles: "helicopter, stunt plane, motorbike, various exotic sports cars... and, of course, the computerized sailboat," Lewis notes. A lot of journalists would come up with such an enviable list—it's unavoidable, given what most of us are paid these days—but Lewis manages to make more of what he sees than the average writer: "No matter how reckless [Clark's] mode of travel might appear, he never considered himself anything less than the soul of caution. No, for him all the joy came from mechanical intimacy. Machines! He loved to know

about them, to operate them, to master them, to fix them when they were broken. More than anything he liked to upgrade and improve them. I came to believe they were the creatures in the world to whom he felt closest. They were certainly the only ones he really trusted."

Tom Wolfe may have an incomparable gimlet eye for his characters' need to elevate themselves with the likes of Turnbull & Asser shirts, but Lewis manages to move from outside to inside with affection and understanding. In other words, Jim Clark may be a royal pain in the ass to everyone he encounters, but the empathy Lewis creates keeps him from being one to the reader.

The invention of an internet browser and the creation of a healthcare portal (you remember, an entrance onto the information superhighway) are two of the book's major plot lines. Both serve as prime examples—as opposed to idealized myths—of the true messiness of innovation. Lewis shows the wacky trial and error needed to invent the machinery of the Web. Vast fortunes were won and lost, and more than a little mental illness ensued, while people attempted to use the TV as the hardware. He's also very good on the smoke-and-mirrors shows that turned initially cautious venture capitalists into a stampeding herd. Perception was just as important in Silicon Valley as it is in any American high school.

There's a great section in the book in which Clark desperately tries to convince some traditional engineers

of the potential for computer graphics, the ability to use software—created by Clark—to design on the computer in three dimensions. The resistance to this product, as with many new products, was immense. A lot of people, Lewis notes, "thought it was a useless toy." Clark was dismissed by the likes of IBM and Hewlett-Packard. When an engineer from Lockheed saw an onscreen demonstration of a car being designed and redesigned in 3D, he allowed as how it was fine for cars but not for the airplanes he designed. "He didn't understand that Clark's new company [Silicon Graphics] made it possible to design *everything* inside a computer," Lewis notes. "And that every new Lockheed airplane from now until eternity would be created by Silicon Graphics' technology."

Then there is the way Lewis handles the homework, the slices of obligatory background information that in the hands of lesser writers could become... stultifying. Some of this information, of course, wouldn't seem obligatory to every reporter: Lewis' brief history of Holland's revered Royal Huisman Shipyard—necessary to explain Clark's choice of a sailboat builder on the other side of the world—is not just hilarious but, as stated above, a clever introduction to the book's central theme, the collision between longstanding traditions and the increasingly mechanized world that will inevitably destroy them. A good many Pulitzer-hungry journalists would have used the presence of so many Indian engineers in Silicon Valley

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These days, an author's ability to find just the right person to explain whatever phenomenon he wants to explain has become a journalistic cliché. When Lewis did it 15 years ago, it was a novelty.

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# Lewis, of course, has gone on to write more books and have even more success, and probably has a bigger summer house than Malcolm Gladwell, though it's hard to know for sure.

to produce a ponderous treatise on globalization, and it probably would have worked. Lewis squashes that phenomenon into a couple of concise, highly entertaining pages and leaves it at that. (How much more, really, do you need to know?)

He gives the same treatment to Clark's near forgotten hometown of Plainview, TX, to his explication of old-fashioned bankers vs. newfangled bankers, and to the early history of Silicon Valley. "At some point in the early 1990s the engineers had figured out that they didn't need to build new computers to get rich," Lewis writes. "They just had to cook up new things for the computers to do. The thrill was in the concepts; the concepts were the recipes." This information may sound like old news now—kind of—but at the time the description perfectly encapsulated the invisible, electric energy that was Clark's world, and it was information readers couldn't get from the pages of *Businessweek*, *Fortune*, or *Forbes*, largely because most of their reporters didn't understand what was happening much better than the general public.

One reason *The New New Thing* is so authoritative is that Lewis learned about the shifting world of business and economics firsthand—he described his sentimental education on Wall Street in the 1980s in his first book, *Liar's Poker*. (Salomon Brothers' CEO John Gutfreund may be nearly forgotten, but Lewis' coinage of the term "Big Swinging Dick" has not been, probably because so many men will always find the term flattering.) As the author of a book on the rise and fall of Enron, I speak from personal experience when

I say that it's helpful to have some background in your subject before you plunge in. I know this isn't true of all writers with experience in their fields, but that knowledge can be helpful when you are trying to make an extremely complicated subject not just comprehensible but actually fun to read. Lewis also has a great light touch; as much as I love the work of Matt Taibbi, the former doesn't have to call an investment bank "a great vampire squid ... relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money" to make his points, and he is more credible for his restraint.

In fact, on a second read, *The New New Thing* stands as an elegant exercise in the art of understatement. The very best example of this comes in the book's penultimate chapter, in which Lewis notes the presence of a tuba in Clark's home. By then we think we know everything about Clark—how he puckers when he's angry, that he's relentlessly competitive about nearly everything, that finishing anything is, for him, a death sentence—but we don't ever know exactly why until Lewis explains the presence of that tuba in Clark's home, just a few pages from the end of the book. I don't want to spoil the ending here, but the tuba serves as a profoundly powerful reminder of the poverty—emotional and financial—of Clark's early years. It's a brilliant bit of armchair psychologizing on Lewis' part, and saving it for the end has now struck me in two readings as a terrific, gutsy piece of craftsmanship. Rosebud II, almost.

After I reread the book, I Googled Jim Clark, something I could not have

done when *The New New Thing* came out. So many technogeniuses have come after him—Eric Schmidt, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, etc.—and so many things have happened, including 9/11, the wars in the Middle East, Hurricane Katrina, the global financial crisis, and so on, that Clark and even the tech boom are now a footnote in the digital world we all blithely inhabit. Clark himself has since invested in a variety of enterprises, given away a lot of money (not surprisingly, he's also taken some back), and remarried for a fourth time, to an Australian model named Kristy Hinze, who is 36 years younger than his 70 years. (Nancy Rutter walked away with \$125 million.) Clark's daughter, Kathy, is fittingly married to a co-founder of YouTube.

Lewis, of course, has gone on to write more books and have even more success, and probably has an even bigger summer house than Malcolm Gladwell, though it's hard to know for sure. And *The New New Thing* still works as a primer for me. For its humor, its style, its cogence, and its timeless picture of the entrepreneurial mind. Most important, I remain in awe of Lewis' ability to tackle a serious subject without taking any of it too seriously.

As it turns out, so is Malcolm Gladwell. "I read Lewis for the same reasons I watch Tiger Woods," he told *The New York Times* in 2013. "I'll never play like that." Then again, maybe that's just his imagination. **CJR**

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MIMI SWARTZ is an executive editor at Texas Monthly and is currently working on a book about heart disease.



## The view from here

Photojournalist Lynsey Addario's intimate account of life and love in war, and why it pays to work the fringes

BY VANESSA M. GEZARI

A FEW MONTHS AGO, TROLLING through *The New York Times* website, I came across a slideshow on Syrian child brides in Jordan by the gifted photographer Lynsey Addario. I watched the images unfurl: a striking silhouette of a pregnant 17-year-old refugee standing next to an unmade bed in a darkened room; a group of mostly married girls in head-scarves, looking like giggling teenagers at the mall; a sly and intriguing photo of pregnant and lactating women at a refugee camp, shot through a screen.

Then came an image that stopped me. It depicted a girl in an emerald headscarf sitting in a dim room with a baby on her lap. The caption said she was a 16-year-old who had left an abusive marriage to return to her family, but it wasn't her dramatic story that caught

my attention. It was the light. The baby is little more than a suggestion in the dusky room, but from somewhere outside the frame a ray of white sunlight falls directly on the girl's face, brightening her exposed forehead and the green headscarf covering her nose and mouth and giving the image the chiaroscuro quality of a Caravaggio. As I stared at it, I felt some of the excitement I imagined Addario might have felt at capturing that moment, that light, in just the right place, with the right girl in the right-colored headscarf.

"A perfect photograph is almost impossible; a good one is hard enough," Addario writes trenchantly in her engaging memoir, *It's What I Do*. "Sometimes the light is there, but the subject is in the wrong place, and the composition

**Uprooted** A 21-year-old refugee from the Syrian civil war outside the cave she and her family were living in after fleeing to Lebanon in January 2013.

doesn't work. Sometimes the light is perfect, but the subject is uncomfortable, and his awkwardness shows. I learned how difficult it is to put all the elements in place."

Addario makes good pictures most of the time; occasionally, she pulls off a perfect one. Some of both are included in her memoir, hidden like buried jewels between long stretches of prose that recount a thrilling and lucky life. The photo of the Syrian teenager with the baby captures exactly the kind of moment that Addario claims to grasp more fully now that she is a mother herself. "My experience as a parent has taught me a new understanding of the subjects I photograph," she writes.

Addario didn't always think that motherhood would benefit her

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# While in captivity, a Libyan soldier held a cellphone to Addario's ear so his wife could insult her: 'You are a dog. You are a donkey. Long live Muammar.'

work—quite the opposite. In 2009, after she was injured in a car accident while on assignment in Pakistan, friends suggested that she take a break from work and get pregnant, as her fiancé had been urging her to do. Addario was infuriated. "If I took six months off to have a baby, I believed I would be written off by my editors," she writes. "I was in a man's profession. I couldn't think of a single female photojournalist who was married or had a child."

**IT'S WHAT I DO IS A STORY OF GUTS**, professional ambition, and personal growth that will be familiar to a generation of journalists who came of age on the battlefields of America's war on terror after the attacks of September 11, 2001. It is also the story of a woman making her way in a man's world, whether she's fending off men grabbing her ass while shooting on the streets of Pakistan, or being told by a male correspondent that her being a woman will interfere with their access to a prominent Afghan leader they've been assigned to profile. (Addario quickly finds her way to the warlord's mansion, and is busy shooting when her colleague shows up.)

Addario has spent much of her career photographing war. She has done difficult, dangerous duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, with side trips to such garden spots as Somalia and Libya, where she was famously kidnapped with three other *New York Times* journalists in 2011. Her memoir recounts these adventures, along with scenes from a disappointing love life:

a cheating boyfriend, an ill-fated war-zone affair, and a string of other passionate disasters that make her doubt her long-term romantic prospects. "I worried sometimes whether I was condemning myself to a spinster's future: forever single, having affairs with random men, my cameras dangling all over me," she writes. "It could have been worse."

While Addario's photos of battle are effective as journalism, her images of ordinary people, especially women and children, at the edges of conflict transcend news. Her book includes a striking picture of a Cuban couple watching Fidel Castro on TV that Addario took when she traveled to Havana on her own dime during a break from covering press conferences, accidents, and the Yankees' ticker-tape parades as a young AP stringer in New York.

In 2000, having moved to India to freelance, she traveled to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, borrowing money from her sister to pay for the trip. Once there, she was at first "too nervous" even to shoot the landscape from the window of a moving car, but she finally worked up the courage to ask her translator if she could photograph him after prayers. The result is a gorgeous image of a vanishing human figure against a monumental landscape of mountains and sky. "From then on, I knew to search for moments like that—more intimate, more private," she writes. This insight serves her well in Kabul, where she shoots covered women in a hospital, and later in Chad, Sudan, and Congo, where her photographs evoke, stun, and flirt

with abstraction. It is worth asking what Addario's being female has to do with her preference for capturing the "private" and "intimate," and what her story can tell us about the special barriers and opportunities for women working internationally, particularly in war zones.

**ADDARIO GREW UP IN WESTPORT, CT**, the youngest of four daughters born to hairdressers who threw lavish pool parties and opened their homes to drag queens and other figures of the suburban counterculture. When Addario was eight, her father left her mother for a man who was a close family friend. Addario and her sisters lived with their mother, whose income plummeted after the split. They moved to a smaller house without a pool, and their mother gave up her two-seater Mercedes.

When Addario was 13, her father gave her her first camera, a Nikon FG. She went off to Madison, WI, for college, where she studied international relations and took lots of pictures, but didn't plan to become a photographer. "I thought photographers were flaky, trust-fund kids without ambition," she writes.

After graduation, she waited tables, saved money, and then moved to Buenos Aires to learn Spanish and make pictures. "My quest was simple: to travel and photograph everything I could with what little I had." Eventually, at the suggestion of a boyfriend, she approached the editors at an English-language daily and offered to be a freelance shooter. Her big break came when Madonna was filming *Evita* in Buenos Aires. "I will be famous

someday ... if you just let me in," she told the security guards stationed around the set. They obliged, and her picture made the front page of the *Buenos Aires Herald*.

This is the first time we glimpse the scope of Addario's ambition, but not the last. A visit to a Sebastiao Salgado exhibit in Buenos Aires erased her youthful sense that photography was a job for trust-fund kids. "I was so overcome by his images—the passion, the details, the texture—that I decided to devote myself to photojournalism and documentary photography," she writes. She worked hard, and she had big dreams. "I wanted people to recognize my photographs, to be affected by my work," she writes. "The more I worked, the more I achieved, the more I wanted." After moving to New Delhi to freelance, she emailed *The New York Times* photodesk over and over, but received no answer. "I felt that if I could only shoot for *The New York Times*—to me, the newspaper that most influenced American foreign policy and that employed the world's best journalists—I would reach the pinnacle of my career."

She got her chance in Pakistan after the 9/11 attacks. Addario knew that she would have access to areas off limits to men, so she began visiting women's madrassas. "I was getting photographic material and access

I wasn't seeing in other publications," she writes. Her "Women of Jihad" series appeared in *The New York Times Magazine* in the fall of 2001, a giant coup for a young freelancer.

Addario's career took off after that. From Pakistan and Afghanistan, she headed to Iraq, where she photographed her first bombing and experienced the death of a colleague for the first time. Covering war became a way of life: From the roof of the *Times* house in Baghdad, she could see plumes of smoke from explosions, and knew which way to drive for the story. Back home in Istanbul, she reunited with her feckless boyfriend but felt like "a caged animal." When she found photographs of a woman in a drawer, she barely had the energy to confront him. "I accepted his philandering as one of the compromises of the work and lifestyle I had chosen," she writes. Soon, she returned Iraq, "happy to be back to the world I understood. In Iraq I didn't have to worry about finding pictures of strange women in my drawers, or wonder why no one cared that a war was going on."

She sought solace in an affair with a fellow *Times* correspondent, and sent her cheating boyfriend packing. But in 2004, she and her lover, whom she identifies only as Matthew, were kidnapped outside Baghdad and held for several hours by Iraqi insurgents. Addario

thought she was going to die. When she made it back to Baghdad and called her father, he begged her to come home. But Addario didn't want to leave. She "accepted fear as a byproduct of the path I had chosen," much like her boyfriend's infidelity. She tried to pull herself away from deadline work in violent places, but only half succeeded. After Iraq, she headed to Darfur, and developed an interest in Sudan that would keep her returning for years. Soon, though, she was back in Afghanistan, where she undertook one of the most difficult and dangerous assignments of her life, spending weeks embedded with US troops in the Korengal Valley, where constant gunfights killed dozens of soldiers.

Addario made that trip with *New York Times Magazine* correspondent Elizabeth Rubin, who was pregnant at the time. When she and Addario opted to stay back with the command element during a battle, two male photographers beat Addario to the action. "I felt like a failure and sensed the limitations of my gender," Addario writes.

Later, Addario climbed a hill to pee during a night patrol and got caught in the middle of a gunfight. Spooked, she asked to leave the embed early, noting that "the only thing that had kept me alive during Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Congo, and Darfur was my inner voice that told me when I had reached my personal limit of fear."



**Access** Women studying the Koran in Peshawar, Pakistan. 2001. Addario realized she could go places and get photographs her male colleagues could not.

**ADDARIO TRUSTS HER INSTINCTS**—most of the time. She has years of experience, and her work has been honored with a MacArthur genius grant and a Pulitzer Prize, yet she continues to be plagued by self-doubt. When she left the Korengal embed early, she was overcome with regret at abandoning Rubin. Back in Istanbul, she cried in the bathroom, reproaching herself for “being an inadequate journalist.” In Libya, she was terrified almost from the start, but didn’t leave soon enough. Minutes before she and her male colleagues were detained

in Ajdabiya, Addario recalls watching a group of French journalists, known for their machismo, speed out of town. “I said nothing,” she writes. “I didn’t want to be the cowardly photographer or the terrified girl who prevented the mén from doing their work .... My colleagues would never have accused me of being wimpy or unprofessional; I was the one who was all too aware of being the only woman in the car.”

At least three of the four *Times* journalists seized that day—Addario, fellow photographer Tyler Hicks, and reporter

Steve Farrell—had been detained before; the fourth, Anthony Shadid, had been shot while reporting in the West Bank. At a time when conflict journalists are increasingly becoming targets of violence, Addario writes, such dangers “had become the job.” As they awaited their fate, Farrell vowed to stop going to war. The others stayed silent, knowing they would keep taking dangerous assignments. “Journalism is a selfish profession,” Addario writes. “But I still believed in the power of its purpose, and hoped my family did too.”



**Collateral damage** A 7-year-old boy who village elders say was wounded by shrapnel from a US bomb during fighting in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, in October 2007.

Addario and her *Times* colleagues have written already about their kidnapping, but Addario adds details that highlight the bizarre and creepy mindset of their Libyan captors and the Libyan officials who managed their transfer out of the country. A Libyan soldier held a cell-phone to Addario's ear so his wife could insult her: "You are a dog. You are a donkey. Long live Muammar." Addario was not raped in captivity, but she was repeatedly groped. When they were delivered to Libyan government custody, an interpreter asked if she needed any "feminine things." "I found it odd that the Libyans would tie us up, beat us up, psychologically torture us for three days, and then offer to buy me tampons," Addario writes. Later, the same interpreter brought her a bag of clothes that included underwear with the words "shake it up!" on the front.

It was in Libya, in captivity, that she pledged to get pregnant if she made it out alive. But when she was reunited with her husband and, shortly thereafter, learned she would soon have a child, she prayed that the pregnancy tests were wrong. "I was not at all ready to give up my life, my body, my travels," she writes. She flew off to Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Mogadishu. "I was holding on to my identity, my freedom, what I had been working toward my entire adult life—as well as panic that it was all about to disappear with the birth of my child."

When she was six months pregnant, Addario traveled to Gaza on assignment for the *Times* to photograph a prisoner exchange. On her return to Israel, she arranged to avoid the full-body scanner at the Erez checkpoint, fearing the radiation could harm her unborn child. But when she got to the checkpoint, a rude Israeli soldier gave her a choice: the scanner or a strip search. She was made to pass through the scanner three times, then asked to take off her clothes. Furious, Addario realized that if she was being subjected to such treatment as an American from *The New York Times*, a poor, pregnant Palestinian woman must have it even worse. "I could suddenly understand, in a new, profound, and enraging way, the way most people in the world lived," she writes. "I had been seeing that reality for years. But somehow, I had to admit, my pregnancy and the vulnerabilities of motherhood had offered me yet another window on humanity, yet another chance at understanding."

Addario's pregnancy didn't set her career back as she'd feared. Her *Times* editor promised to give her work, even after she had her baby. "I was shocked by his reaction," Addario writes. She wondered whether "the industry was changing a little. Was it possible that I had finally proven myself enough?" Her question conveys the insecurity that some female war correspondents feel, even after they have become more macho than the men.

Since September 11, a growing number of women have gained prominent positions covering conflict for major news organizations. But the path to those jobs—which are exhausting, dangerous, and often make a stable and nurturing personal life impossible—is paved with stories that male editors find interesting and important. Female journalists sometimes put themselves in more difficult and dangerous situations than might be strictly necessary to show they are tough enough to hack it.

But why is the best story necessarily in the midst of combat? And who decides that is the best story, or the only story worth telling? On her first trip to Iraq in 2003, Addario decided to go north to Kurdistan, to "work around the edges," because she suspected she lacked the physical stamina to embed with the military invading Baghdad. But working at the edges should not be seen as a handicap. The best stories and the best pictures are arguably always around the edges, in the private and intimate spaces where people live and adapt, suffering or thriving in war's lurid half-light. These are stories that Addario and other female journalists are uniquely equipped to tell. **CJR**

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VANESSA M. GEZARI is the author of *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice*, and an adjunct professor at Columbia Journalism School.



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**Beyond the front** US Marines freshen up outside one of Saddam Hussein's palaces after driving the Republican Guard out of Tikrit.

# It's not the economy, stupid

How postmodernism destroyed journalism  
(and independent bookstores)

BY JULIA M. KLEIN

**WE ARE DEEP IN THE JOURNALISTIC** trenches, mourning the shrinking and shuttering of newspapers and magazines, bemoaning declining salaries and freelance rates, jawing about the elusive new business model that will somehow reverse all these trends.

Now comes Scott Timberg, an arts reporter laid off by the *Los Angeles Times* in 2008, to tell us that we are not alone. Not that this assurance should be mistaken for reassurance. According to Timberg, America's entire creative class—a group he defines as embracing everyone from rock musicians and architects to bookstore clerks—is under assault. In his view, the slow death of print, our obsession, is just one manifestation of a much broader and more troubling crisis.

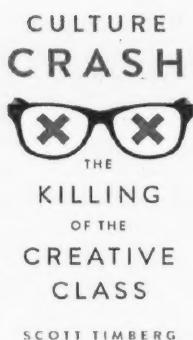
Expanding on stories that Timberg wrote for *Salon*, *Culture Crash* is not just a *cri de coeur* for an endangered set of jobs and institutions. It also is an audacious, if undeniably speculative, effort to detail the causes of these cultural tremors, and to point the way toward possible solutions.

The roots of the problem, Timberg argues, lie deeper than the latest economic downturn or technological upheaval. "Though highlighted and exacerbated by the Great Recession, these shifts started earlier and almost certainly will extend for years into the future," he writes. "The arrival of the internet and the iPhone, while crucial, are

impoverishment); the pressures on journalism and book publishing; shifting emphases in higher education.

Second, he links these phenomena to what he sees as a decades-long attack—some of it fueled, ironically enough, by the creative class itself—on "middlebrow" culture. As Timberg defines it, this is the consensus culture represented by publishers' book clubs, Leonard Bernstein, PBS and NPR, well-made blockbuster films, and the long-gone bipartisan support for the National Endowment for the Arts. For Timberg, "middlebrow" is not a pejorative but something of a rallying cry—a correlative to a middle class that is itself under threat.

In Timberg's view, both this culture and its middle-class audience, not to mention the creators of culture, have been crumbling in tandem. And the stakes, he writes, are high: "The price we ultimately pay is in the decline of art itself, diminishing understanding of ourselves, one another, and the eternal human spirit." Timberg's prognosis is at once overwrought and worrisome—more so certainly than the recurrent headache of a few thousand unemployed and underemployed journalists. In the end, *Culture Crash* is about a cause that is also a result—a problem that a pessimist might judge intractable.



**Culture Crash: The Killing of the Creative Class**  
By Scott Timberg  
Yale University Press  
320 pages  
Hardcover: \$26

not the only forces at work here." Casting a wider net, Timberg implicates such factors as the rise of postmodernism, the (possibly related) devaluing of the arts and humanities, and an unforgiving winner-take-all marketplace.

*Culture Crash* is an ambitious manifesto on two fronts. First, Timberg yokes together a raft of developments—some clearly parallel, others less obviously related: the struggles of the music industry to counter bootlegging and cut-rate streaming; the burgeoning of the freelance sector (and its simultaneous

FOR HIS NOTION OF THE CREATIVE class, Timberg acknowledges a debt to the urban-studies theorist Richard Florida. In his 2002 classic, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, and in subsequent work, Florida has explored the role of a subgroup of intellectuals and professionals in fueling urban economic development. Timberg, by contrast, tracks the decline of this class—a viewpoint reinforced by the recent recession and by his own definitional shift. Timberg rejects Florida's concept of the creative class as "anyone who works with their mind at a high level," including "research scientists, medical professionals and software professionals." Instead, he opts to construe the class both more narrowly and more broadly—as "anyone who helps create or disseminate culture." That means scientists, doctors, and software developers are out, and "deejays, bookstore clerks, theater set designers, people who edit books in publishing houses and so on" are in.

Timberg's other starting point is his personal narrative: He was one of hundreds of workers laid off at the *Los Angeles Times* under real-estate mogul Sam Zell. After his layoff, Timberg and his family struggled financially and eventually lost their house. Timberg says he knew many others—architects, a photographer, a graphic designer, a landscape painter—in the same economic boat. So he started chronicling the phenomenon.

"My main concern . . ." he writes, "is seeing not simply that creativity survives—that aspect of human experience will never entirely die—but that its exercise remains open to any talented, hard-working person." The issue, he says, comes down to America's "founding myth and national folklore: the idea of meritocracy." (Timberg doesn't tease out the implications of his own formulation—that the meritocracy is largely mythical, since success has always depended on luck, gender, race, and the right parents, as well as talent.) Timberg's argument is that, if we don't take care, "culture work will become a luxury"—a development already manifest in the proliferation of unpaid journalistic internships and the plummeting rates for freelance writing, photography, and similar endeavors.

Timberg unpacks case studies of three cultural utopias, fostered by both a critical mass of artists and the institutions and values that allowed them to make a living. He offers by way of example the poetry scene in Boston and Cambridge in the 1950s, with Robert Lowell at its center. Lowell's students, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, along with other poets—Adrienne Rich, Richard Wilbur, W.S. Merwin—all benefited from the availability of university teaching jobs, productions by the Poets' Theatre, publication in literary venues, and other institutional support. Timberg also points to Los Angeles' thriving arts community in the 1960s and Austin's dynamic live-music scene.

In perhaps his most romanticized chapter, Timberg discusses the progressive disappearance of a whole class of culture workers—the clerks who once staffed record, video rental, and independent bookstores. (Timberg himself worked at Tower Records during the 1990s recession.) These vanishing stores, he argues, served multiple roles, providing day jobs for aspiring artists,

curatorial expertise for customers, and a sense of community for both.

Timberg also touches on the new "gig economy," where the rhetoric of branding and free agency runs up against the realities of life without security or benefits; the erosion of the music industry, and especially the plight of independent musicians; and the implosion of architecture, a field decimated by the Great Recession's impact on the construction industry. (Architectural employment dropped nearly 30 percent in just three years.) Timberg adeptly marries data with anecdotes and quotes from impoverished musicians, former store clerks, and luminaries such as the poet and critic Dana Gioia, a former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Most of the developments he cites are explicable as the fallout from technological and economic pressures. But Timberg chooses to adopt Gioia's perspective: "The problem isn't the decline of the economy," he tells Timberg, "though that doesn't help. The problem is the collapse of culture."

In a chapter titled, "Idle Dreamers: Curse of the Creative Class," Timberg argues that anti-intellectual strains—always part of American life—have deepened in recent years, and that celebrity coverage has overwhelmed attention to the challenges faced by more typical working artists. It doesn't help, he says, that newspapers have laid off as many as 80 percent of their arts writers since the turn of the century.

Timberg reiterates this plaint, which he has good reason to take personally, in a chapter on "The End of Print." No doubt "critics and cultural journalists have helped shape culture and bring prestige to its makers for at least five centuries;" but other journalists, too, are storytellers, Timberg argues—and besides, many novelists initially honed their craft at newspapers. All these roles are imperiled, he reminds us. He underlines the unassailable point that the Web, while making it easy for just about anyone to publish, "has put downward pressure on freelance rates and salaries." And, in another familiar refrain, he worries that the short attention span the internet tends to foster will spell the end of the more reflective and considered culture of print, if not print itself.

Probably the boldest claim that Timberg advances is his indictment of postmodernism as a destructive attack on culture with broadly deleterious consequences. This attack has emanated from the academy, not our profession—most journalists wouldn't know postmodernism from a doorpost—but Timberg argues that we are all its victims. He offers a whirlwind tour of various critical schools—structuralism, "deconstruction," feminist criticism, cultural studies—and says that they have leached the joy out of reading and other cultural pursuits. Even the avowedly populist Pauline Kael comes in for some bashing, for allegedly "championing the kind of work that did not really need a critic's advocacy or interpretation." In fact, Timberg's crankiness is reminiscent of the reaction by earlier critics of modernism, who also lamented that the cultural world as they knew it was coming to an end.

Thanks largely to postmodernism, Timberg writes, we are graduating fewer (novel-reading, theatergoing) humanities majors. One could argue, of course, that practical considerations—including a spate of recessions and the sexiness of high-paying Wall Street, consulting, and tech jobs—have been more decisive in this decline.

Timberg understands that his vaunted "middlebrow consensus," with its "shared body of artistic and intellectual touchstones," had its limits. Still, he wants it back. And his most concrete suggestion, inspired by the European model, is to beef up public funding for arts and culture—a somewhat utopian idea unlikely to counter all the other pressures on print culture, indie music, and embattled freelancers.

Hardly the last word on the subject—not even, one would hope, the last word in print—Timberg's *Culture Crash* is a well-intentioned effort to further a nascent discourse. Timberg hasn't proven his case; it may indeed be impossible to prove. His erudition, in fact, represents something of a counterargument—an indication that our culture, while perhaps speeding toward annihilation, has not yet hit a brick wall. **CJR**

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JULIA M. KLEIN, a CJR contributing editor, is a cultural reporter and critic in Philadelphia. Follow her on Twitter @JuliaMKlein.

# Parking lot floods when man bursts

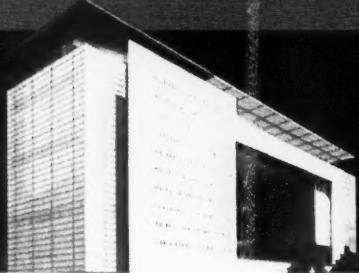
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## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

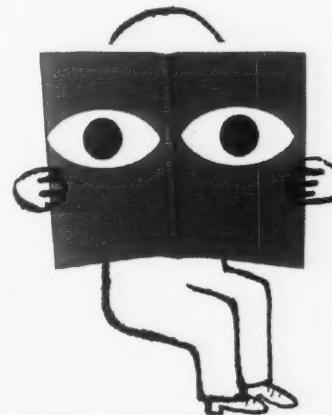
### The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington

By Gregg Herken  
Alfred A. Knopf  
494 pages: \$30

IN THE GEORGETOWN SET, Gregg Herken, a historian of the middle decades of the American twentieth century, hypothesizes that a cluster of officials, diplomats, intelligence operatives, and journalists from a chic neighborhood in northwest Washington exerted major influence on the way that the United States conducted the Cold War.

However, aware that the term "set" may carry unpleasant overtones, he first takes care to distinguish the Georgetown set from its most notorious predecessor—the Cliveden set, a gaggle of British aristocrats who gathered at the country house of the American-born Nancy Astor in the years before World War II and are remembered now for seeking to appease Hitler. Herken makes clear that he believes that his Georgetown set was unlike Cliveden, in that it may have done some good. He concludes, in fact, that its activities contributed to victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Moreover, Herken sees the Washington era he describes—from 1945 to 1975—as a time of achievement, preferable to today's bad-tempered, gridlocked capital. He vividly describes the social activities of the Georgetown set, placing at its center the loud, argumentative "zoo parties" on Sunday nights at the home



'A long-abandoned Washington tradition hints at a simple remedy; one reducible to a single word, in fact: gin.'

of Joseph Alsop, who wrote, with his brother Stewart, a widely disseminated column of revelations and opinions. In a recent column about his book, Herken reveals the secret ingredient that he believes made the Washington of that day tolerable: "A long-abandoned Washington tradition hints at a simple remedy; one reducible to a single word, in fact: gin." (Or vodka, he adds.)

Indeed, the gatherings of the Georgetown set seem infused with drunkenness, as well as more than a touch of madness. Two prominent participants—one from the CIA, the other the publisher of *The Washington Post*—committed suicide after mental breakdowns. The arguments at 2720 Dumbarton were often loud, abusive, bitter and possibly incoherent. The Alsop salon had a brief episode of glory with the election of a neighbor, John F. Kennedy, who notably stopped in at Joseph Alsop's home after attending inauguration festivities. The Kennedy era soon ended, but the partying did not.

It is the way of Washington that elite journalists and elite

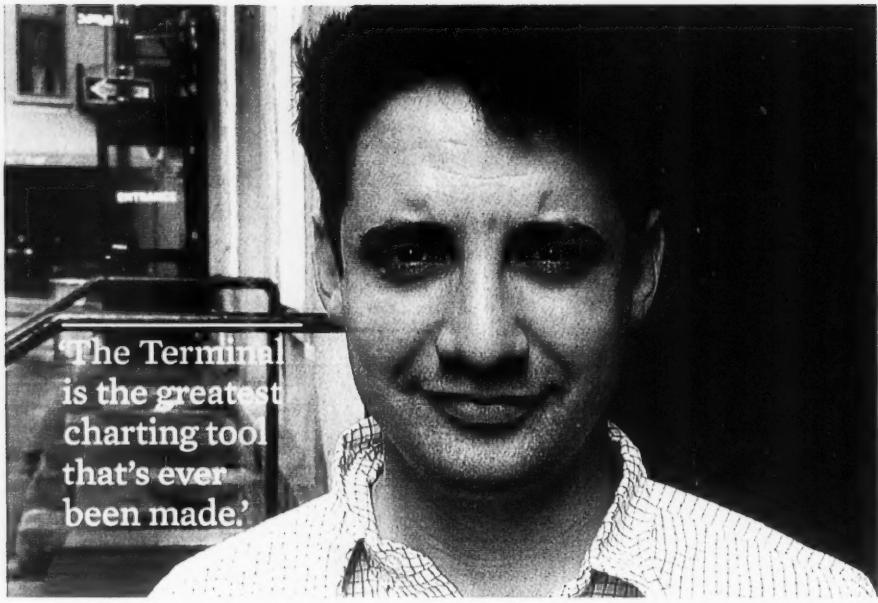
officials socialize. But joining the Georgetown set was of uncertain benefit to journalists, who valued access to power but had to offer something in return. In Georgetown, *The Washington Post* supplied the most prominent newspaper people. Alfred Friendly, managing editor until 1965, was a Georgetown neighbor of the Alsops, as was his successor, Ben Bradlee, who had become a close friend of Kennedy as Washington bureau chief for *Newsweek*; Bradlee wrote a book about the closeness of that relationship. After the death of the *Post*'s publisher, Philip Graham, in 1963, his widow, Katharine, took over the paper and remained a devoted Alsop salonista.

Herken suggests that one result of this closeness was at least a tacit commitment to support policies favored by those in power—to take a minor example, backing some of the early CIA's frivolous initiatives, such as fomenting two-bit rebellions in eastern Europe. This closeness eventually had serious consequences for the reputation of the *Post*. It tends to be forgotten now

that the *Post*, like Joseph Alsop, remained a firm supporter of the American presence in Vietnam long after it became apparent the war was heading for disaster. The *Post*'s later reputation as a scourge of bad government came in large part from the work of two outsider (non-Georgetown) reporters.

Oddly, Herken throws his whole thesis into doubt with a statement near the beginning of the book: "The Georgetown set also bears no slight responsibility for the miscalculations and disasters of that era: the danger, profligacy, and waste of a runaway nuclear arms race; reckless and costly clandestine adventures overseas; complacency in the face of political reaction at home; and, not least of all, the protracted debacle of Vietnam." Clearly, Herken is too good as a historian not to make this acknowledgment, but he undermines himself. So much for the benefits of gin. CJR

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the Columbia Journalism Review and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.



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#### EXIT INTERVIEW

## Boosting Bloomberg's 'shares'

IN OCTOBER, BLOOMBERG HIRED BUSINESS INSIDER'S **JOE WEISENTHAL** AMID a wave of high-profile additions to its newsroom. At *Business Insider*, where he worked since 2008, Weisenthal rose from a blogger to executive editor. At Bloomberg, he'll run a new finance and economics site and host a TV show. CJR's **Christopher Massie** asked him about the challenges and potential of this venture.

**The popular perception of Business Insider as a place to get entertaining and snappy political and economic analysis coincided with your tenure there. How did it evolve into that role?** The trick has always been—whether it's covering tech news, economic news, or anything else—to cover it in a way that's smart enough so that people in the industry will appreciate it, but also enthusiastically enough so that people outside will find it compelling. Business content, finance content, have historically not been presented in ways that are entertaining. Billions of dollars are made and lost every single day in the market, so there's absolutely no reason why it can't be a thrilling thing to follow, just like if you were following sports.

**I've read a lot about how it matters a great deal to you to break news. Why does getting there first matter so much?** It's about reliability. Whether it's a piece of economic data or a move in the market, you want to continually reinforce the message that this is the place that has it. Otherwise, if readers start seeing that you're not on top of it, then they're going to have to follow someone else.

**Bloomberg already has tons of people analyzing markets. What do you offer that it lacks?** One thing that I can bring to the table beyond my personality is lots of experience in what works well on digital. How to make content that may seem technical or arcane sing on the internet so that lots of people read it.

**BuzzFeed ran a story last November that expressed some skepticism about how your style would translate to Bloomberg, which is known for being dry. Is that a cause for concern?** I feel very in-sync at Bloomberg. One of the reasons I was excited to come to Bloomberg is that a lot of the things that I personally care about as a journalist are the things that this company is built on: breaking news, data. I mean, the Terminal is the greatest charting tool that's ever been made. I love charts, as anyone who follows me on Twitter knows.

**So what are you going to change?** I think there are opportunities to take the reporting and chunk it up in some ways that makes it better for the internet. Visuals is a big one, both in terms of art and in terms of more charts. There are all kinds of ways to take the great reporting that's being done and put it online in a way that really pops and makes you say, 'Oh, this is something I want to share.'

**What's the biggest adjustment in moving to Bloomberg?** Naturally, at a small startup like *Business Insider*, things move extremely fast and are flexible. At a really large organization, that's more of a challenge. But I've found that people are very entrepreneurial here. There's a culture of saying 'yes' to ideas and 'yes' to projects. So I actually think it's going to be less of an issue than I would've guessed.

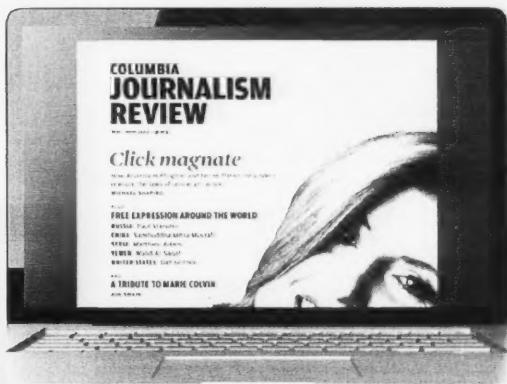
**What will constitute success for these projects?** Obviously, if you're doing something online you want traffic and all that stuff. But I think the true thing is to create something that everyone recognizes is a compelling media product, whether it's on the Web or on TV. I want people who are in finance or who are in markets to say, 'This is an important place where I get news from.' At Bloomberg News there's coverage of a lot of things that most news organizations would consider quite arcane. But taking all that and hopefully gaining some people who never thought they would be interested in those subjects, that is a huge part of my mission here. **CJR**

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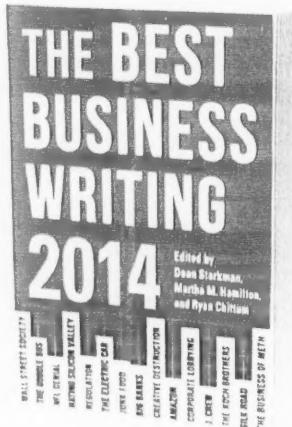
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